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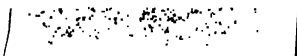
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**THE HEIRS OF THE FARMSTEAD.**



THE  
HEIRS OF THE FARMSTEAD;

OR,

LIFE IN THE WORSTED DISTRICTS OF YORKSHIRE  
TWENTY YEARS AGO.

A Tale.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ORPHAN UPTON," ETC.

---

LONDON:  
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PATERNOSTER ROW;  
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TO HENRY BROWN, ESQ.,

MAYOR OF BRADFORD.

DEAR SIR,

Be kind enough to accept the Dedication of this volume. The favour is solicited for this, amongst other reasons, that you fill the highest civic office in a borough that has been very properly designated the Emporium of the Trade with which the following tale is so closely connected. I should have asked your patronage for these pages with less hesitation, had they possessed higher literary merits. I venture, however, to hope, that their general moral tone will secure for them your favourable judgment. It is to me most gratifying to know that you belong to that class—an increasing class I am happy in believing—who look at the moral tone and tendency of fiction, as well as its literary character; and who have the discernment to see, and the courage to declare, that the most finely rounded periods, vivid illustrations, and exciting plots, are wholly inadequate as compensations for perverted taste, wilful error, and corrupting influence.

It was to me, I assure you, a most pleasing circumstance, when you received the well-merited compliment of re-election to the dignity of Chief Magistrate of the Borough. It augurs well for a town at large when its highest office is held by a gentleman distinguished by the urbanity, liberality, and conscientious attention to duty, which you have so conspicuously and uniformly displayed; and especially is it cause for mutual congratulation and joy to the friends of religion and progress, to be presided over by one sympathising so thoroughly with every popular and philanthropic movement as you have been found to do.

Praying that you may long be spared to wear the high honours that have been conferred upon you, and to receive the grateful acknowledgments of the many recipients of your bounty,

I am, dear Sir,

Your most obliged,

And obedient Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

December, 1857.



## PREFACE.

---

THE aim of the writer of the following pages has been to produce a Tale free from those serious defects which, alas, mar a large proportion of modern Fiction. A good Tale he regards as a great treasure. Tale-reading is an inexpensive amusement, accessible to all classes; and when the story is fitted, as ought always to be the case, to instruct the understanding, and aid in the discipline of the heart, it becomes a profitable mode of spending a portion of our leisure time. Of the Fiction-form of teaching, the writer, of course, approves. He can see no valid objection to it. It was adopted, to some extent, for purposes of illustration, by the greatest Teacher—the Lord Jesus Christ. He believes it to be neither desirable, practicable, nor right, to suppress it. The success of this description of literature proves incontrovertibly that it has a power of exciting and sustaining interest, possessed by no other forms of prose composition, nor even yet by poetry itself. Truth *acted*—seen, that is, in living forms—is more easily understood and remembered, than truth stated merely in abstract propositions.



Against a large proportion, however, of modern Fiction, many grave objections may be preferred. There is a numerous and popular class of tales—romances rather—whose scenes and sentiments appeal to the lowest passions of the most depraved ; and whose plots are formed by grouping the wildest and most improbable events, the bare supposition of whose actual coincidence in life is matter of the sheereſt absurdity. Then there is another class, which, whilst exhibiting scenes comparatively faultless, yet breathe an *animus* most repulsive and pernicious. Religion and good men, they either wholly ignore, or grossly caricature, and thus prove their writers to be the subjects either of most deplorable ignorance, or of a most execrable capability of distorting and misrepresenting facts ; in either case making it pretty plain, that they are guilty of great presumption in coming forward as the moral guides of the people. Every-day life is not one series of tragedies ; nor are all pious men hypocrites or fanatics.

No apology can be necessary for placing before the public a Tale of Life in the Worsted Districts of Yorkshire Twenty Years Ago. Yorkshire is by no means the most insignificant county in England ; nor are its worsted districts amongst its poorest, dullest, or least interesting parts. On the contrary, the Author is of opinion—with all deference, of course, to the judgment of those amongst whom it is so fashionable to speak disparagingly of his native county—that there is much mind, activity, life, there ; and that human nature may be seen in not

a few of its many phases and developments, in its thriving towns and scattered hamlets. This was especially the case twenty years ago. Then was witnessed a memorable struggle between hand-loom weaving and "power-looms." The Author should have the credit of knowing something about it, for he was in the midst of it. He beheld many of the events narrated in this Tale, from Robert Morgan's "stand-point."

The Writer would further add, that he has not sought to gratify, in style, the fastidious classic ; nor to feed, by his plot, that morbid craving for the marvellous which impels so many to take up works of Fiction. He has endeavoured to write in a plain way, for plain men ; and, by confining himself to *actual occurrences* or *obvious tendencies*, to produce a Tale which, whilst amusing the reader, shall also enlarge his acquaintance with men and things ; illustrate the influence of literature, companionship, and social institutions ; and furnish him with reflections and inferences, that may not be altogether useless in the strife of life.

*December, 1857.*



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# THE HEIRS OF THE FARMSTEAD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCES THE HEIRS OF THE FARMSTEAD.

THE reader well acquainted with the worsted districts of the West Riding of Yorkshire, will be aware that they contain, in addition to their thriving towns, numerous small villages. Many of these villages have been much indebted to the worsted trade, and have acknowledged the obligation in part, by pouring ample revenues into the coffers of many connected with it. Some of them contain, besides their small cluster of cottages, two or three farm-houses; having generally robust constitutions, but standing in rather ungainly attitudes; and that usually hold up their heads as quite the aristocracy of the little place. In the time when hand-loom weaving was most remunerative, England had few more happy or more prosperous spots than these. The shuttle sufficed to provide a handsome maintenance for the family; whilst the fact that it did not suffice to meet the demand for "pieces" in the market, diffused amongst the producers an independent and contentful spirit. There are few scenes that we like better to visit in thought, than one of these villages some twenty years ago, whether in the hour of its greatest bustle, or in that of its holiday pastime. Pleasing was the excitement that prevailed in a great throng, when each window, with its loom and earnest worker, sent from its uplifted sash in summer, the ceaseless click, click, click, of the busy shuttle. And pleasing it was to see the weavers, after a week of cheerful

toil, start out for their respective masters, carrying their fabrics much as Bunyan's Christian has been represented as carrying his burden of sin prior to obtaining a view of the cross. And pleasing, nay, delightful was it, to witness the half-day holiday with which the close of some busy time was usually honoured; when children and young people sported on the "village green;" and those whom years and family cares had made more thoughtful, assembled in small groups, and discussed the news of the day, or laughed at the rumoured attempts of "power looms" to supersede their manual labour, and steal a march upon them in the market. It was in connection with a village of this description, that some of the incidents of our tale transpired.

In 183—, M—— was an interesting little spot. Some of its cottages were very pure and white externally; whilst three or four, more favoured than the rest, had large gardens attached to them, which in fruit-time were often the scene of certain predatory excursions on the part of those members of the juvenile fraternity who didn't believe in monopoly as regarded ripe gooseberries. Huge trees towered up here and there, whose feathered boughs, in summer-time, threw, like large parasols, a most delicious shade over many a thin and shrinking roof.

Three farm-houses condescended to grace the scene with their presence. They were stationed at respectful distances from one another; so that the glory of the place, as they, no doubt, considered themselves, was not thoughtlessly huddled into a corner, but diffused in a way commensurate with its extent. Each had certain peculiarities. One was very old, and had a grim, surly, unsocial aspect, as if it couldn't contemplate with anything less than supreme contempt, the upstarts that had recently come out of the quarry and planted themselves about it. It belonged to a family of houses of considerable standing, and was therefore entitled to great respect. It might not have the finish and fittings of modern buildings; but had it not upon it the moss of a hundred years? And was not that of infinitely greater worth than anything else a house could have? Another was not only old, but very large. It would

then have accommodated six such families as that which it held. It contained a long, wide, unsightly chamber or garret, where thick shadows, and it was believed by some, real ghosts, gambolled away the heavy hours of midnight; and where hungry rats and mice fought over loose wisps of musty straw, and mouldy heaps of dirty chaff. The third was not very large nor very old. It was a comparatively recent erection, and wore an attractive appearance. It had ventured to be singular amongst farm-houses in Yorkshire, for it had evidently grown up with something about it of contrivance and plan. It stood in a good situation; had provided itself with a few neat, commodious outbuildings; had made excellent arrangements for collecting, preserving, and mixing manures; hadn't any more room than it was probable would be required; and altogether appeared to have started off with the intention of conducting the cultivation of land much as tradesmen conduct their business, namely, on something like system. It was known as the New Farmstead.

Its occupant was a gentleman who had been some time connected with the worsted trade, but had then retired from it, with the intention of spending the remainder of his days in easy, agricultural pursuits. He had lived in the village previously to his connection with the trade; and a small part, the nucleus as it were, of the farm on which he had settled down, had been left him by his father. He was unmarried, but had a large circle of relations, including brothers and sisters. These either lived in, or hung fast to, the skirts of M——. Thomas, the youngest brother, resided at the house with the long, wide chamber, or garret; whilst Mrs. Lee, a sister and widow, dwelt in a neat cottage, with her only son.

Mr. Sykes, of the Farmstead, was a grave, methodical, kind-hearted man, upwards of sixty, with an intelligent face, and something manly, honest, and straightforward in his look, voice, and manner. He possessed broad sympathies, and was altogether a gentleman of whom his country might properly have been proud. He looked with great disfavour upon whatever in his judgment was calculated to tarnish the national honour, or that tended in any way to endanger the national



well-being. He was decided as to his religious principles, and was a warm and constant supporter of Sabbath schools and mechanics' institutions. In his retirement, he sought frequent companionship in books, but did not isolate himself from kindred, or even neighbours.

He took special interest, however, in two nephews; one, the elder, the only son of Mrs. Lee; the other, the eldest of his brother Thomas's family. These nephews, of course with their parents' full approbation, were a great deal with their uncle. And often has the writer envied their lot, as he has seen them on bright Sunday mornings wending their way with him across green fields to some place of worship; or at other times starting out on some promised excursion, freighted with rich luxuries; or hastening, as the thick gloom of a winter's night began to gather, towards the Farmstead, whither he knew they had been invited, that the long hours of their evenings might be spent with him in attempts at self-improvement. Luther Lee was a tall, rather slender, genteel-looking young man, who had been nursed with much care and fondness by his mother. Simeon Sykes, his cousin, was, in appearance, somewhat of a contrast to him. He was rather low and stiff; carried a slight approach to coarseness in his features; and was not altogether free from that property in respect to his general disposition. He followed the occupation of his father, and was of great service to him in the management of the farm.

One evening in December, some twenty years ago, Simeon Sykes might have been seen—was seen in fact—approaching the cottage of Mrs. Lee, with a brisk air and a quick step, like some one intent upon business that he very much relishes. Had the reader entered the cottage just before Simeon Sykes, he would have seen a staid, comely, mild-looking woman busy with her scissors and needle. He would have seen on the table at which she sat, a snow-white cloth, with creases suggestive of domestic cleanliness and comfort, and ornamented with cups and plates, and other articles, that told plainly of a coming meal. And had he looked around he would have observed that he stood in a small, but tastefully arranged room, that had its corner chair, its book-shelves, and its

window-plants, and that seemed to say in the hundred dancing reflections of the bright fire thrown from its polished furniture, This is home! sweet, sweet home! It would no doubt have occurred to the said reader, that the comely female didn't live alone, but that some one was expected, whose comfort and happiness the preparations indicated were intended to promote. This suggestion would have derived considerable force from the presence of a pair of boots on the fender, and the attitude and manner of an old dog, which one moment winked very hard at the fire, as one who knew a trick or two, and the next turned his head slowly towards the door, as if fully expecting some one. Some one was expected, and that some one was Luther Lee. Had the reader proceeded to a little room overhead, whence a succession of tumbling sounds were then issuing, he would have found Luther Lee at his toilet. He had been away most of the day, and was giving himself, as his cousin was wont to express it, "a general do up," preparatory to partaking of the mentioned repast. Simeon entered rather unceremoniously, to the great disappointment of the old dog.

"Well, aunt, here I am! Is Luthy ready?"

"He will be, I hope, in a short time. Come and sit down, Simeon."

Now it happened that the corner chair, stretching out its hospitable arms; and protruding its soft, puffed cushion, seemed to his fancy just then particularly inviting; and there occurring to Simeon no objection to his meeting its friendly advances, and giving himself up to its embraces, he proceeded at once to do so. It also happened that Mrs. Lee became, at the moment he did so, very much absorbed, first, in the threading of her needle, then in her sewing, as if not disposed to say a very great deal. This left Simeon little more to do than to look around him; which he did, taking at the time a sort of inventory of his cousin's comforts. This inventory so swelled out as he continued his observations and reflections, that he burst out, without making any preface whatever,—

"By Jove! What a list they make! There is no hanging on here. If I had them, I know whether I would go read in the hay-loft!"

Mrs. Lee was surprised. What did he mean starting off in that abrupt manner about lists and hay-lofts! So looking up she observed,—

“What has put lists, and hanging on, and hay-lofts into your head just now, Simeon?”

“Oh, I have just now been making out a catalogue of my cousin’s comforts! I am sure, aunt, you allow him to want for nothing. I only wish my mother would look so well after me.”

Simeon’s mother came very much short in this respect. Mrs. Lee knew it, and Mrs. Lee much deplored it. True, there were extenuating circumstances in the case. She had a large family and much work; but whilst these might palliate her conduct somewhat, they came far short of justifying it, in the judgment of Simeon’s aunt. But Mrs. Lee was a judicious woman, so she replied,—

“You must bear in mind, Simeon, that Luther is an only son, whilst you have brothers and sisters. You cannot, therefore, reasonably expect that she can make you as comfortable as I may make him. Besides, she has a great deal of work in connection with the farm; whilst I, you well know, have only this cottage to look after.”

“As to work, aunt, that is no excuse, because father has pressed her again and again to engage a servant. But she won’t. Certainly, we are rather thickly planted, and cannot therefore be trimmed and pruned so tidily as Luther is. But there might be a little improvement. We haven’t even sitting room near the fire these winter evenings. We have to hang on one another’s chairs; and what makes all worse, she won’t allow us a touch of light to read by. So there we are, sometimes for a whole hour, hooked on to one another, and pinching and poking one another, and quarrelling, until it becomes hateful. You and Luther don’t do so, I am sure, aunt.”

Certainly they didn’t, and there seemed something in the suggestion so ridiculous to Mrs. Lee, that she laughed.

“And you wouldn’t laugh either, aunt, if you were to get

one of my pinches sometimes. When they won't let me hang on quietly, I can soon bring tears into their eyes."

"My dear lad," she observed, becoming very serious, "don't suppose I am laughing at your little disadvantages. I am not. And don't you go and talk in this way in company about your mother. Always put the best construction upon all she does. Children ought not to sit in judgment on their parents, nor parade before others what may happen to transpire on the hearth of their own home."

"Ah, now aunt, you remind me of things in Luther's lot I shouldn't like. You are always so particular as to what should be said and done. Living under you, aunt, is something, I guess, like what it must have been to live under the Jewish dispensation. You have so many precepts, that your government can be nothing less than a yoke. I am never bothered by my mother with lessons, excepting one now and then about turning every halfpenny I get into a sixpence, and sticking fast to the little silver gods. That bit of business excepted, I may live pretty much as I list."

Now Mrs. Lee wasn't the woman to censure Simeon's mother in Simeon's presence, so she simply observed in reference to the point he had mooted,—

"It appears, Simeon, that your mother and I differ in our treatment of our sons. I should be sorry to allow any one committed to my care to grow up without a little watchfulness and counsel on my part. I look upon the human mind somewhat as you look upon a field. What a field may be, depends, you believe, very much on the culture it receives. Well attended to, it may be made to yield a valuable crop; neglected, it will be covered with worthless weeds. So I think in reference to the mind. Much depends upon the instruction given it, and the training it receives."

"Well, just so, aunt," Simeon observed, interrupting her. He was either tired of the conversation, or he wished to introduce a topic that had, for him, greater charms; for he went on.

"How do you think we shall get on to-night? What is it that uncle has to say to us? My mother will have it that he

is about to hand all over to me and Luthy, and then leave the country."

"Nonsense, Simeon, why should he do that?"

"Of course I don't know; but I am sure of this, that something is brewing. A big, tall fellow, who could if he liked, aunt, whistle down your chimney as he goes past, without much effort, has been with him two or three hours together for several days past. I guess there's some machinery for will-making in that bag of his."

"Simeon! don't suggest such vulgar things as whistling down a chimney."

"Nor," interposed a fresh voice, "such foolish ideas as uncle abdicating in our favour. You are always on this money question, Sim. I should be sorry, very sorry, were Uncle Sykes to leave the country, even if I happened to get all the Farmstead by the move."

"No such luck as that, lad. At least, no such luck as your enjoying it. Mother would scratch your eyes out if you were to become sole lord of that property. She fully expects that I am to have half, at the very least."

"Your mother likes brass, Sim!" Luther observed, good-humouredly.

Mrs. Lee reproved her son. Sim, however, appeared to think that it would be well on some account to express his concurrence in the view of his cousin, for he replied,—

"Yes, she does that! I believe that saving occupies her thoughts from morning to night. My mother would have done what Judas did, with first-rate zest; and would have done it much more thoroughly. She wouldn't have gone back snivelling with the thirty pieces of silver. She would have stuck to them like a vice. But be quick, Luther, and let us be off. I have to go to another place after leaving uncle's, and I want to get home before the weavers put out their lights. I don't like darkness anywhere."

Luther used considerable despatch, which enabled them soon to appear at the Farmstead. Mr. Sykes was evidently expecting them, and it appeared had something special to say to them; for he observed as soon as they were seated,—

"We will not read this evening, but spend an hour in conversation. You would infer, no doubt, from my message, that I had something particular to say."

They had done so.

"I would add that I desire it may be regarded as strictly confidential."

Having re-closed the door with his own hand, snuffed the candles, and turned his chair towards the glowing fire, he proceeded thus:—

"You well know, my nephews, that I have taken a deep interest in you for some time. You will hardly consider, I hope, that I overrate the little attentions I have paid to you, if I point to them as proofs of this. I am thinking, however, of a more substantial proof of that interest, and it is in reference to it that I have sought the present interview. I am fast approaching the evening of life. My sun will soon cease to shine, even if no cloud prematurely obscure its face; for already do shadows stretch along my path, betokening its near approach to that grim horizon which shall terminate its course, and quench for ever its light. You are aware I have been so fortunate in life as to acquire a little property, which, of course, I cannot take with me. I should regard it, with my present views, as a calamity if I could. I have no family, as you well know, never having been married. I have hence resolved, as you are my brother's and sister's offspring, to make you the Heirs of the Farmstead. My other property I shall leave amongst my other relatives, and to be devoted to charitable purposes. I particularly desire, however, that you will keep this decision a perfect secret; and that you will not allow it to cause you to neglect any efforts which might otherwise appear necessary to your success in life. I mention it rather as a stimulus to, than as a substitute for, exertions of your own to get a little property. Recollect it is a decision that may be revoked, and a decision that will be revoked, unless you continue very steady. I have a strong aversion to any property of mine being spent in dissipation. I am willing to help an endeavouring, but not a profligate young man. Bear in mind then, that I shall watch your conduct narrowly; but that at

the same time I shall be willing to render you, as heretofore, all the helps I may be able in any attempts you may make to rise in life."

He went on, speaking in plain and forcible terms of life in general—its dangers and difficulties, its disappointments and deceptions; and the propriety, as well as rectitude, of living for higher and nobler ends than either pleasure or property, secular learning, or mere worldly laurels. Luther Lee was a reverent, attentive, and eager listener to the proposals and counsels of his uncle. As a parched and arid soil drinks up with apparent relish the soft shower that in summer-time comes down upon it, not leaving even one drop to be absorbed and carried back into the region whence it has come, so did Luther with the kind words that then fell upon his ear. He drank them up, thereby refreshing holy feelings and nourishing noble resolutions. Not so Simeon. He listened with the dejected air of one receiving reproof. There were wanting the open face and admiring look of his cousin. Instead of these, there was at one moment a furtive glance at Mr. Sykes, as if he was wishful to watch him, and yet afraid to meet his eye; at another, a slight twisting of his body and shifting of his chair, as if the manly words of his uncle scourged him like so many knotty thongs, or pierced and punctured him in every joint like fiery probes. He didn't like his uncle's lecture. Those conditions spoiled what would otherwise have been a generous proposal. So he said as they were leaving the house,—

"This way of doing things doesn't suit my taste at all, Luther! I don't see that uncle is going to do anything very particular for us. He offers to make a bargain with us for the Farmstead, that is all. You must do certain things, and then, at my death, you shall have it. Bah! why not offer out and out to sell it to us for cash? I would as soon try to find the money at once, as bother my head about the conditions he talks of."

"Uncle's terms are not unreasonable," Luther replied, as he shut the garden-gate. "Be steady, he says, and you shall have the Farmstead. I think he is quite right. Some of the greatest blessings of existence are to be obtained only upon conditions very similar. Health, peace of conscience, heaven—

those are not to be obtained irrespective of conduct. The principle pervades the whole of God's government."

"I'm not disposed to trouble myself about God's government, Luther. Good night! my way lies down here."

"Good night!" Luther returned, grieved that his cousin should be so ungrateful for their uncle's kindness, and sorry that he did not, like himself, start at once for home.

---



## CHAPTER II.

## TWO HOMES.

"Down here" must either have been a long and circuitous way, or Simeon must have loitered a great deal; for full three hours elapsed after Luther had gained his mother's cottage before Simeon passed it on his way home. He was walking at a quick pace, probably because the weavers' lights were fast winking out, for he didn't like darkness. One remained, however, near to the old farm-house, throwing its pale beams on to the grey wall that enclosed its weedy garden. Upon this light's friendly ray he had often calculated, for early and late in winter-time it was there, shining with the constancy of a fixed star. One toiled at that light, converting muscle, strength, life itself, into bread, for six sleeping children. It had often rendered him kind service in the way of relieving that thick drapery of darkness with which the place of his abode seemed so often hung. It happens, however, sometimes, that the very beam which chases away mere shadows, brings into view objects of terror; that it reveals dangers as well as dissipates illusions; and thus it comes to pass, that that which we hoped would inspire us with confidence fills us with fear. It was so in the case of Simeon that night. In the dim stream of light then issuing from the weaver's window, he beheld at a short distance what to his creative fancy appeared a large bear, balancing itself with rather indifferent success upon its hind legs. His wasn't a mind to suggest that the presence of a veritable bear in such a spot was a highly improbable thing. Nor was it of that bold, inquisitive texture and make, to prompt him to march right up to the illusion, strip it of its filmy mask, and ascertain its real character. He was timid and credulous, and consequently received, what he afterwards denominated, "a most

monstrous fright," that sent him hurrying into the house, still more the victim of superstition than before. In this state of things, it was some relief to Simeon when he found that he was not entirely alone. The hangers-on had retired, and were in blissful unconsciousness of his fearful pokes and pinches; but his mother had not betaken herself to rest in the proper sense of the term. Her son's visit to the Farmstead that evening she had regarded with much interest, and had hence resolved to sit up until his return, that thus she might obtain the earliest information respecting the decision of Mr. Sykes. She could hardly be considered, however, as exactly in an expectant frame of mind; for she was very hard and fast asleep, gaping somewhat widely and snoring somewhat loudly, besides giving other indications of being, as even very great people generally are in sleep, supremely indifferent to such secondary matters as manners and appearance. Her head was wrapped in a scanty flannel cap, that had much more of the appearance of a tight bandage than a night head-dress. Her hard features were receiving a sallow, jaundiced hue, from a small rusty lamp that hung above them, burning very dirty oil. Her slipshod feet rested on a wooden fender that enclosed a few ashes strongly resembling pounded brick; whilst the fire above, by which those ashes had been deposited, was well nigh smothered with steaming turf and scaly coal, intended to burn until morning.

Let not the reader pity Simeon's mother. There is no call for any such outlay of feeling. At least, let him not pity her as he would any one compelled by stress of circumstances to appear as she was then. Dinah Sykes was not poor, but penurious. Her circumstances and style of appearance arose, not from the want of means, but from the love of pelf. Saving, as her son assured Mrs. Lee, occupied her thoughts continually. She saw no worth, no greatness, nothing to be desired, in anything but in money. Every transaction was conducted, and every question estimated, with a reference to money. Marriages and births, life and death, were viewed only in relation to money. The deep, yellow lustre of gold was the light of her eyes; in it her grovelling mind saw imaged all that was worth desiring or having. It was the theme that burdened

her tongue. Even for bereaved and sorrowing neighbours she had no words but those of congratulation, if it so happened that cruel death had lessened their family expenses. The heart might be impoverished, but if the purse were at all enriched, that, in her view, was a gain which ought to turn the deepest mourning into joy, the wildest grief into singing. Hence her interest in the disposal of Mr. Sykes's property; an interest, that denied to her jaded frame its due allowance of repose; that had nursed a vague intimation by that gentleman of favour toward her son, into an absolute certainty of immediate succession to the Farmstead; and that prompted her, when she awoke that night, to follow her son, with greedy ear, to his bed, whither he had gone, that the demon within her might feed upon the fat promises and prospects which, she had no doubt, he had borne off with him to the land of repose. And hungry that demon must have been; for his greedy growl was in every tone of her voice, and his ravenous look in every feature of her face, as she bent over her son's pillow that night, extorting from him all she could of what had passed between their uncle and his nephews.

Ah, Dinah Sykes, beware! Yield not to that lust within thee, but strangle it as thou wouldst a viper. Hearest thou not the creaking of the boards above thee? That heavy sound, as of the cautious dragging of some murdered body along the floor of the old, unfrequented garret? And now that muffled thump, thump, as of some ghost slowly mining its way to thee, to remind thee that there are other things in God's universe besides gold? Thou sayest in thy heart, they are but rats; thus following in the wake of the thoughtless world, that is ever slow to interpret aright the voice that speaks to warn. Well, rats if thou wilt, that have been peering with their bright eyes through the wide seams in that rotten floor, and that are now bounding with frantic joy over their loose wisps of musty straw, or dancing in wild delight around their mouldy heaps of dirty chaff, because that thou, like them, art tormented with an appetite thou canst not satiate, a fiend thou canst not appease!

Simeon's replies were far, very far from satisfying his

mother. One reason was, he had no materials at hand out of which to construct such replies as he well knew his mother wanted; another was, that he had no disposition to indulge her with any, even had he happened to possess some ready made. He was in a bad humour. He had been from the moment of leaving his uncle's; and the somewhat unprepossessing appearance his parent presented to him whilst hastily despatching his supper, had increased that ill-humour, and sent him to his bed the subject of a vile temper and of deep disgust. Hence she charged him with neglecting to play his cards; with failing to come round his uncle. She reminded him, that except he managed to secure the whole, or a large part of the Farmstead, he would be a poor beggar, with only one or two paltry cottages; and that she would not give a button for the trumpery, called learning, which he was getting from his uncle, if he failed to get his property. He was to coax, to flatter, to scheme; to leave, in short, no artifice untried at all likely to impress Mr. Sykes with the conviction, that the best, the wisest, the most religious thing he could do, would be to stand at once on one side, and let Simeon go in as his heir and successor. Having reiterated the sum of her commandments, which was, *Save! save!* she left her son to his meditations, and hastened away to snatch a few hours of rest.

Simeon continued in a bad humour for a long time. He continued so until he fell asleep, rolling and tossing upon his bed, but wholly unable to shake it off. He continued so throughout the following day, during which his countenance wore a sullen, perplexed expression, and his tongue gave to those who asked him anything, saucy, curt replies. He was so in the evening, when his cousin Luther called upon him; and the evening following that, as they were on their way to the Farmstead, he was particularly petulant. Again Simeon parted from his cousin at the garden-gate of their uncle, obstinately refusing to go directly home, and also positively declining Luther's offer to accompany him. The latter had begun to suspect that all was not as it should be with Simeon. This circumstance, however, confirmed his unpleasant suspicions.

"I don't like this," he observed to himself, as slowly he bent

his steps towards his mother's door. "Sim is not what he once was. What can he be about at this hour and in this darkness? He is not particularly fond, in a general way, of either solitude or night. I'll bottom this mystery. I'll seek the counsel and co-operation of Robert Morgan, and we'll know what it is all about, if possible. It cannot be disagreeable to my uncle, nor can it be really hurtful in the end to Sim himself."

Robert Morgan was a young man for whom Luther had a most decided partiality; and as he, and the family to which he belonged, will probably cross the path of our heroes somewhat frequently, it may be the best to introduce them at once to the reader. The Morgans lived then in M——, and had done so for many years. Abel Morgan, the father, was of middle-size and firmly built, with a calm, thoughtful face, and a well-developed forehead. He taught a small day-school, which, however, was very indifferently supported. Hence, to eke out a subsistence, he had to toil morning and evening at a loom. He had one son and one daughter. The former he was bringing up to the weaving craft; but at the same time was bending his best energies and help to his education. The latter did such household work as their homely style of living devolved upon her. Robert was slender and feeble, with a pale, but not altogether uninteresting countenance; and had a well-shaped head, covered with waving locks of black hair. His sister was fresh and pretty, the image in face and form of her mother,—a modest, tidy, good-looking female, who had gone down into the darkness of the grave, with the bloom of health on her cheek, and the light of life in her eye. The standing of the Morgans in the village at this time, was not exactly what one would choose. Many regarded them with coldness and suspicion. One cause of this was the calling of Abel Morgan. He was a mere schoolmaster. It may surprise some that a calling so noble should to any extent excite feelings so despicable. But such was the case; and if the reader will make himself acquainted with the position which, thirty, aye, twenty years ago, was assigned to the humbler class of schoolmasters in the West Riding of Yorkshire, and the treatment they

received from uncultivated and superstitious farmers and artisans, he will find that the writer of this narrative is borne out in his statements by indisputable facts. Abel must, of course, be lazy and childish, or he would not spend his time with children. So argued many in M——; loudest amongst whom were some who spent their time in ploughing, sowing, and reaping; and who, in respect to intelligence and high moral feeling, were little above the clods on which they operated. Far, however, as the poles are asunder, was the inference from the truth. In addition to the pleasure Abel had in his work—for it was work, notwithstanding that they considered it play—he had a notion, that it was a high and honourable occupation; that characters are manufactured in schools, and that such manufactures are of the most important description; that the schoolmaster exerts a greater influence on the nation than the statesman, the warrior, the merchant, or the author; that somehow he has a hand on the main-spring in the great machine, a hold of the reins that guide the moral forces of a people. Of course he was wrong! Of course society says at this day he was wrong! Brought to the bar of public opinion, the press, the platform, he will be condemned as a vile, deluded fanatic!

Another cause was, the general character of Abel Morgan. In a certain sense, he was a daring sort of man. He denounced such things as fortune-telling, witchcraft, and apparitions. In short, he laughed to scorn all the superstitions of the place. With more courage, perhaps, than prudence, he was not backward to show his contempt of them. At least rumour said so. It was in every one's mouth, how that Abel Morgan defied the arts of all the witchcraft in the world; how that he ridiculed the bare idea of any one being able to look into the future; and how that he denied the appearance and existence of apparitions. It was even said, that to express the contempt he had for the latter class of fancies, he had actually resorted to what were considered their haunts, and thrown himself into what was believed to be their path. Some even went the length of saying, that he had been known to steal out alone in the solemn hours of midnight, when "Guy-trash" was supposed to be abroad, rattling his heavy chains, and sporting

his saucer-eyes ; that he had had the temerity to peer, more than once, into an old smithy, just at the hour when, according to report, "Bloody-bones " was in the habit of emerging from the dank bowels of a deep and nearly dry well it contained, to prow around such habitations as happened to be infested with naughty children ; and that there could be no doubt he had been seen at twelve, and one, and two o'clock at night, in the vicinity of an old sheepfold, challenging the appearance of a huge, grinning, white cat, that was supposed to frequent at all unlikely hours the said sheepfold.

This last act of daring was mentioned with quite a shudder, forasmuch as the said cat was known to be the spirit of a wicked old shepherd named Kershaw, which, on account of its vile ways, had gone off at last in a body of dancing sparks, and could find no rest, but came again, mewing piteously and grinning fiercely, like one racked with pain, as a warning to all who might be in any way given to making free with their neighbours' property. It was suggested, as somewhat strange, that Abel should be able to do this with impunity. But the explanation was often, alas, resorted to in such cases, that he had sold himself to the evil one ! At this, of course, Abel laughed, not doubting that the time would come, when even the most benighted parts of Yorkshire would do him, and the class to which he belonged, ample justice.

It has come, thank God ! and all honour to you brave men for fighting so manfully with superstition as ye did then ! Unhindered, uncared for, ye held out in the face of persecution, until the light of the press, the platform, and the public opinion of our larger towns, came to your assistance, dispersing the thick shadows that were wont to muster so strongly on those hill-sides and moor-tops where ye laboured and suffered ! Now we hail you as heroes, whom in our childhood we helped to brand with infamy !

Another cause of the peculiar standing of the Morgans was, the general conduct of Abel. He did not imitate the ways, or echo the opinions exactly, of his neighbours. For example, he was not to be seen regularly at the small Methodist chapel in M——, which, by-the-bye, had the sole responsibility of the

people's religious instruction and training. One reason was, the low character of its ministry, and the fact that when he did happen to go, those good brethren occupying the pulpit, and knowing anything of him, were sure to make some allusion, in as sarcastic a way as they knew how, poor men, to the vanity, evil, and sinfulness of learning. Those times were the villagers' moments of revenge; and triumphantly would they leer and goggle at Abel Morgan the while, who, with a little more colour than he was accustomed to carry in his face, would endeavour to look as if not at all conscious that the preacher's remarks were in the least applicable to him.

Then he rendered himself unpopular in another way. He was very sanguine as to the progress of science and discovery, and had no doubt that great revolutions would be thereby effected in social life. He almost worshipped the steam-engine, and was rarely happier than when expatiating on the wonders which by it would be achieved. He saw plainly that it would supersede weaving by hand, and believed it would find its way into the field, and perform some of the operations of husbandry. Now unfortunately for Abel, he didn't keep these opinions to himself, but made them known, and grounded thereon certain counsels to working men, the drift of which was, that they would do well to get a little information, to acquire the art of writing and a facility in accounts, that they might be able to adapt themselves to that altered state of society which, he foresaw, machinery would introduce. But oh dear! how badly this was taken! They hoped they should never live to see such a state of things as he predicted, and were sure he could be no friend of theirs if he believed in its approach. As to the farmers, why, they were overcome with the supreme ridiculousness of the thing. The idea of a steam-engine in the field! Let it once get there, and it would soon stick in the furrow as many a noble team had done! It might do very well so long as working on polished surfaces, and so long as assisted by oil and grease and other lubricating helps; but let it once get in amongst clay and clods, and it would no more be able to force its way across the field, than a miner is to force himself through the earth! Ah me! How slow are we to avail ourselves of improve-



ments ! How zealously have they been kept out of the farm-yard !—Query : Had the approaches of the serpent in Eden been as zealously repulsed by Eve, as have the inventions and offers of genius by posterity, would that great event have happened which has been so generally deplored ?

This being the case with the Morgans, it is not surprising that Luther's mother should seek to moderate somewhat his intercourse with them. This she did, not so much from principle, however, as from policy. To check it altogether would have been next to impossible ; for there were few things Luther enjoyed more than spending an evening at the old school-house. Here he felt safe in breaking his secrets, and privileged in being permitted to ask for counsel ; happy in talking about the news of the day, or the gossip of the village ; honoured in being allowed to discuss some question connected with physical science, or some knotty point pertaining to "figures." He felt that he there breathed an atmosphere agreeable to his nature ; an atmosphere under whose mild, nurturing, invigorating influences, his heart and understanding freely opened ; freely and naturally, as expand the petals of the flower bathed in the soft light and fanned by the sweet breezes of its native clime.

Luther took advantage of the first opportunity that presented itself to mention to Robert Morgan his unpleasant suspicions, and to ask for his advice. It was evening when he presented himself at the door of the old school-house for that purpose. Young Morgan and his sister were in ; the former busy with his book, the latter with her knitting. They were sitting beside a small table, opposite a bright fire. Their home was humble and unpretending, but had about it an air of comfort, of which even some gorgeous apartments with which he was acquainted were in his opinion wholly destitute. Its white walls, that received periodically a coating of fresh lime ; its smooth, clean, cool, stone floor, besprinkled with sand that crunched most agreeably when trodden by the foot ; its ancient clock, beating heavily in its corner, hoarse with the repetition of its monotonous tale ; its old oak desk, chest, and corner-cupboard, that carried the thoughts captive into the far, far past ; its large, sable table, at

whose sides polished leaves dangled like drooping wings, as if it had once had some idea of flying ; rude book-shelves, crammed with works of every variety of excellence ; the dry, wholesome flavour, and deep, luscious hush, that seemed to fill every crevice in the place ; combined to make him feel that night, that for such retirement and repose it would be no task to renounce the pomps and forego the possessions and pleasures of the world.

Robert Morgan and his sister were always glad to see Luther Lee. His visits were hailed with joy, and remembered with gratitude. Hence he was received with a hearty greeting, and pressed to take the "old arm chair." This naturally suggested an allusion to the absence of Abel Morgan, who usually occupied that chair when at home. This drew from Lucy Morgan the observation, that her father had gone all the way to Leeds, where he would remain for a few days, to assist an old friend to inspect and furbish up a quantity of second-hand scientific apparatus he had purchased. This, again, naturally of course, caused Luther to look very pleasant and to feel very comfortable. Not that Abel's presence was at all, in a general way, an unpleasant restraint to him, or his absence in a general way coveted. By no means. And he was not the only one who looked pleasant, or seemed comfortable, beneath that roof that evening. They each talked and jested and laughed, passing buoyantly and happily from topic to topic, as flies the summer bee, with buzzing-wing and merry hum, from flower to flower, deeply regretting that there should exist a necessity for their separation, and that the hour for it should be so hastily approached by the old hoarse clock. Luther was anxious to intimate the special object of his visit, and yet reluctant to do so, because he well knew that the bare mention of confidential conversation with Robert would lead at once to the absence of his sister. It did so. She preferred withdrawing to her little sleeping-room, to their talking out of doors, as that would not merely expose them to the raw night air, but also to the danger of being overheard by any crafty eaves-droppers who might happen to be hanging about.

Young Morgan was not thrown into the least surprise by

Luther's statement. He could inform him why, he observed, and would do so if Luther wished it, and if he would be sure and not mention his name in connection with the matter. The reason why he made the condition was, that otherwise he might get into trouble with the Sykeses; something he particularly wished to avoid.

"The reason," he went on, "of my not being surprised at hearing of the petulance, irregularity, and mysterious habits of your cousin, is a knowledge of the fact that he has begun to read low, trashy, licentious periodicals and books. You are aware, Luther, that my father is very particular as to the books he places in our hands. He has a notion that literature is a mighty power; that it is especially influential in the formation of character. He says, men do not attach half the importance to it, viewed in this connection, that they ought to do. And I think he is right. Now, there is a class of literature at the present day that cannot but prove hurtful in its influence. It appeals mainly to the passions of men. It feeds and influences what, in every one, is too strong by nature. Pleasure, in its grossest forms, is the pole-star by which we are to shape our course. It laughs at the restraints of the Bible, the Sabbath, and the pulpit. Those are 'green withs' forged by a despotic priesthood to hamper the freedom and degrade the dignity of humanity: but 'withs' that men will as surely and as easily rend asunder when they wake to a consciousness of their true character and destiny, as did Samson the contemptible fetters which his crafty wife, spider like, had woven upon his giant limbs. Now with this literature Simeon has begun to tamper. He reads it in the field, the stable, and the hay-loft. Happening to be teaching for father whilst he is away, I yesterday detected one of the boys in the act of reading a filthy thing, which, he said, Sim Sykes had given him. This low reading has created in Sim quite a liking for low company; and if you will allow me to be frank, I will tell you that I believe he leaves you in the manner you have stated, to seek out and join such company. As to becoming a spy upon him, I don't like that, for there is a touch of meanness about it. However, as you wish it, I'll keep you company

whilst you do it, in the hope it may do Simeon good in the end."

As Luther returned home through the darkness that night, his thoughts ran upon contrasts. There were young Morgan and Simeon. How different! Was that difference owing mainly to books and home influences? Were they to be viewed as specimens of two sorts of character being formed by those means? If so, what a moulding force did they possess! How potent for the purposes of either degradation or elevation! And then there were the homes of the two. Were they, in their arrangements and general superintendence, to be connected with the peculiarities, habits and general principles of the two minds presiding over them? If so, the power of knowledge, high thoughts, and correct conduct, to make home happy with moderate means, was very apparent; whilst the impotence of ignorance and low earthly-mindedness in this respect was clearly seen. It has, but it useth not. It gathers treasure, but to watch it rust. Verily, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

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## CHAPTER III.

LEECHY LUTY'S.

WEEKS passed before Luther deemed it expedient to call upon Robert Morgan to fulfil the promise he had somewhat reluctantly given him; weeks that brought Christmas and New Year's Day to the villagers with their social festivities; that afforded Luther opportunities of seeing more of his cousin and the Morgans; but weeks that added strength to his painful suspicions, and eagerness to his growing curiosity. During those weeks, the small breach that had just begun to appear between them, was unfortunately widened by a new and painful event. It was a reduction of the wages of the hand-loom weavers. This event excited no little discontent and uneasiness in the village. It was the first shock of that mighty revolution which the application of machinery and steam to the art of weaving has effected in many parts of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Mr. Errton sought to reconcile his work-people to the reduction, by the assurance, that he had no alternative but to make it, or to give up trade altogether. Such, he affirmed, was the facility with which those manufacturers who had begun to employ "power-looms" could produce goods, and such the prices at which they were able to offer them in the market, in consequence of a reduced cost of production, that he was compelled in self-defence to lower wages, and otherwise economise in his business.

This proceeding, as a matter of course, received many comments. Luther spoke of it in the presence of his cousin. He had no hesitation in doing so, because he had heard his Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead speak of it, and he had also heard him censure Mr. Errton severely for it. Mr. Sykes declared that machinery and steam had not been so extensively introduced

by manufacturers as to render such a step necessary; that he ought to know, seeing he continued to attend market though without any business there; that such premature and uncalled-for reduction of wages tended to estrange work-people from their employers; a thing which he regarded as a calamity, being well assured that the interests of both parties would be best promoted by the existence between them of a good understanding and of good feeling. Luther talked in a similar strain. Not so Simeon. The weavers were a lazy and extravagant set of folks; they had been able to earn much more money than they knew what to do with; and he was glad that Mr. Errton intended "to put his thumb upon them." He manifested not a little harshness and ill-feeling, which Luther observed, and for which he ventured to reprove him. This brought on a war of words, which left Simeon very sullen, and Luther more determined than ever to find out, if possible, the secret of his cousin's altered temper and ways.

An opportunity, as he thought, was soon thrown into his path; for they happened shortly after to be invited to spend an evening at the Farmstead along with young Morgan. Mr. Sykes had a high opinion of Abel Morgan, and sometimes complimented the family by asking Robert to meet his nephews at his house. It was a dull, heavy evening; not particularly dark, for there was a moon; nor yet to be considered light, for it was invisible. This invisibility arose from the presence of a dense mist, which not only deprived the evening of its due allowance of light, but threw upon everything it happened to touch a sort of thick greasy sweat, most chilling to the sense and slippery to the touch. Here and there were to be seen patches of what appeared, when in the background of the fog, the sheeted relics of some monstrous animals, but which in reality were the remains of large drifts of snow, formed by a recent storm. Thick coatings of tenacious mire covered the roads and bye-paths in and about M——; so that not many of the inhabitants were walking about that evening for the mere pleasure of the thing. An unusual stillness reigned around. Luther drew Robert Morgan's attention to this as they approached the Farmstead; adding that it was just such a night

as Simeon, he guessed, was partial to, when intending to go on his secret errands. He had no doubt his cousin would take advantage of it.

Luther was right. They had no sooner emerged from Mr. Sykes's than Simeon bade them "good night" in a hurried manner; and, pushing down a rough, stony lane, near at hand, he was soon hid from their sight by the fog. This lane led to a small bridge in a hollow that lay in that direction, which bridge they thought it probable Simeon intended to cross. It occurred to them, that by striking into the fields they might be able to reach it before him, and by watching him at this point, get on to his track. Being somewhat ready at jumping walls and fences, they were soon at the bridge; and had gained a good post of observation before they were able to catch the sound of approaching footsteps. They were right in their calculations. Simeon soon appeared on the bridge, creeping stealthily rather than walking boldly. Having crossed the bridge, he paused, looked around, and appeared to listen attentively, as if either expecting pursuers, or hoping to be joined by companions. He then knelt down beside the hedge opposite the one behind which his cousin and young Morgan were concealed, and drew forth something which turned out to be a large, grey coat, with which he so metamorphosed himself, as to render it highly improbable that any one, unacquainted with the real state of the case, would suppose the wearer of it to be Simeon Sykes. When he had done that, he appeared a little relieved, and recrossed the bridge with a bold, firm step, a little after the fashion of a sentinel. On his way back he was brought to a halt by a low, thick, peculiar whistle, to which he replied by a sound as nearly like its echo as it was possible for him to make it. This echo was followed by the appearance of two men, whom Luther and Morgan could plainly see, but whose features they could not discern. They spoke distinctly and earnestly.

"Bravo!" said one of them. "You have got on your extinguisher again, Sim! I wish I might be able, when it becomes desirable, to annihilate my existence as completely as you can put out Simeon Sykes by that concern."

"Yes," he replied slowly, "what with the fog and the coat,

I think I am pretty safe to-night—at least, if I can keep out of the way of a lantern.”

“Ay, that you are,” the other observed. “And as to lanterns, why we’ll see that you are not much endangered by them. If any venture into our way to-night, I’ve a notion they’ll get smashed pretty promptly, even if borne by giants. It won’t be the first time that we have been under the necessity of showing how much we disapprove of such nuisances, will it, Bland?”

“By no means,” Bland replied. “But Sim must understand that if we put out any of those walking stars, it will be for his benefit, and will deserve a consideration. We have nothing to fear, as nobody here knows us. And Sim might be as safe, if he would only let go his mother’s apron-strings, and do business elsewhere. But come along, or we shall not get to Luty’s before morning.”

This intimation as to their destination startled both Luther and young Morgan. Their first impulse was to follow the men, and attempt to prevail upon Simeon to return home. But on debating the point, it occurred to them that the strangers might be very desperate characters; and that, as they appeared to regard Simeon as a sort of prey, any attempt to get him out of their power might move them to great violence. So they wisely resolved to follow at a distance, and learn what they could respecting the trap into which Simeon had fallen.

The reason why the young men were startled on learning the destination of Simeon and his companions, was, that Leechy Luty was counted the strangest and most mysterious man in that part of the country. Nobody knew how he lived, or for what he lived exactly. He shunned observation in a general way, but was particularly careful to conduct his domestic affairs, as the mole does its operations, underground. At this time he would be perhaps fifty-five, thin and pale, with no very particular expression of countenance. He wore black, thread-bare clothes, which had evidently not been made for him; for they stuck closely to some parts of his person, and hung rather loosely from other parts. The coat was short in the sleeves, and long in the back; and here and there bore traces of the



work of a needle, and the dye of what appeared to be ink from a pen. Altogether he had a seedy, faded appearance, something like what a gentleman, compelled to wear the same suit, would be sure to present at the termination of a twenty years' confinement in a debtors' prison.

He lived at this time, and for many years, in a small cottage that stood on the summit of a piece of elevated land called the Roughs. This piece of land was a sort of common, where ling and prickly shrubs flourished amazingly, and where a few sheep just managed to maintain themselves in existence. Luty's was the only cottage—in fact, the only building of any sort upon it. It was a low, round, dark structure, thatched with straw and ling, and something in appearance like what we may suppose a cup-shaped corn-stack would be after standing exposed to the weather for a century. Its parts seemed so welded into one another, as to suggest the idea of its having grown at some time, rather than of having been put together after the ordinary style of erecting buildings. It was surrounded by a high wall, which enclosed a rude garden, containing very large gooseberry trees. A hole in the wall, to which was hung a crazy door, formed the only entrance into the garden; whilst that into the cottage or hut itself, although a little larger, was by no means much more dignified.

Leechy Luty lived all alone. He never was married, nor did he ever, that we are aware of, show the least leaning towards the gentler sex. He had brothers, but they were seldom heard of, and rarely ever seen about M——. Leechy Luty had tended the declining life of an aged father and mother in that hut. He had shown them kind attention, and had honoured them at last with what the neighbourhood considered “very decent funerals.”

Luty professed to obtain a livelihood by hand-loom weaving. This accounted for the presence, in one corner of his hut, of a loom, which was old and rickety, whose boards and beams and treadles were greasy and moth-eaten, and which usually held a warp of coarse thick threads. But people didn't believe that Luty did thus really maintain himself. He was lazy and unapt, they declared, at his calling. It was well known that he

carried very few "pieces" to Mr. Errton, and that those which he did carry belonged to a class of goods for the weaving of which that manufacturer allowed a very small remuneration. Then his movements and habits were altogether of a queer, mysterious character; so that they were sure he must be in the receipt of means additional to those which he obtained by the use of the shuttle. Some said that he dealt in smuggled goods, and from that practice derived a large revenue. Others that he did a brisk business in counterfeit money, coining during the night, and travelling to put it off during the day. Some declared that he professed to be a "wise man," and that under cover of darkness, large numbers flocked to the hut on the Roughs, from whom he reaped a rich harvest; whilst others thought it not improbable that he possessed, in some dark vault underground, a chest of gold, the result of a century's hoarding on the part of his ancestors, which he had begun to use in the expectation of dying without any successor. Some went the length of hinting that he might be in league with Satan, and living upon the proceeds of the sale of his soul to that Prince of darkness; and others, less superstitious, that he might be one of a gang of clever robbers, and his cottage the place where their rich spoils were divided.

These conjectures and surmises had not, up to the time of which we write, taken any very active form. Twice or thrice his premises had been searched, after cases of daring burglary; but there being nothing to be found upon them to implicate him in the least, and it happening moreover, in each instance, that the parties who made these searches received soon after very ill-usage on the roads in the dark, people came gradually to let him alone, with the conviction, perhaps, that it was safest to do so, and in the hope, it may be, that with sufficient rope he would in the end hang himself.

Leechy Luty's views and feelings were in every way as odd as his mode of life. He had little, if any, respect for the civilisation and arts with which he was surrounded. His sympathies were with a different and past state of things. He was one of those scattered instances of a half-civilisation, which still linger on the moors and wide commons of the north of

England ; instances which, like links, connect us with the rude system of things prevailing centuries ago ; which have hitherto resisted the attempts of modern society to swallow them up into itself, remaining, like knots in the body of a growing oak, distinct and peculiar, proof against all its assimilating powers ; in whom survive, but slightly modified, the notions, preferences, and habits of our northern forefathers, when each was located on some patch of ground encircled by acres of uncultivated land, leading dreamy, contented, monotonous lives ; and in whose judgment, if judgment they can be said to have, Englishmen never were, and will never be, happier or greater, than they were in connection with that primitive, simple, unexciting system of things.

Hence the concern of Luther and Morgan when they learnt that Simeon's companions were taking him thither. They, like many others, had come to regard poor Luty with suspicion and dread. True, Robert Morgan had not been taught to do so. Abel, his father, looked upon Luty with pity rather than with awe. And Robert could well recollect that Luty visited his father at one time rather frequently, and that his parent was much pleased with some tales told by him, which were known at the old school-house for a long time by the name of "Luty's Legends." He also recollected, that then he thought the "old hermit of the Roughs" a simple, inoffensive man. But since then, a dark mystery had gathered about him, which appeared charged with the elements of evil ; which he could not help thinking shrouded some web intended to entrap, and prove fatal to, the confiding and unwary. Hence, he connected with Luty deception and danger.

They followed as closely in the direction of the Roughs as it appeared to them prudent to do ; so closely indeed, that they came upon Luty's hut just as Simeon and his companions were pushing back the crazy door in the outer wall. Being so near to that temple of hidden mysteries, they resolved to improve their opportunity by making such observations and discoveries as they might be able. With this view they crept softly through the outer door into the garden, after being assured that the pursued had entered the cottage ; and having so secured

the old door of the hut as to provide against any sudden surprise from within, they proceeded cautiously to peer through such parts of the small leaded windows as had not been rendered altogether opaque by thick, dauby plasters of rags and paper.

To their surprise they could see only one man. He was seated right opposite a glowing fire of turf and sticks, upon which he was gazing with a pair of dull, lustreless eyes, that were fixed in a wan and sorrowful face. Wan and sorrowful too appeared the apartment. The chief items of furniture were, two or three rude stools; a frail delf-case that sported a few highly-coloured plates; a long, smooth, dark stone, elevated on logs of wood to serve the purposes of a table; the loom already mentioned; and a simple contrivance, having a very large body considered in relation to its head, usually denominated by worsted-weavers a "bobbin-wheel." Luther and Robert were much surprised at finding Leechy Luty, as it appeared to them, all alone. Where were Sim and his companions? Had they disappeared through the roof? Or had they merely passed through Luty's on their way to some other destination, just by way of throwing any parties off their track who might happen to be curious and prying enough to follow them? It might be so; but stay. That is very much like a muffled laugh which just now broke on the stillness, and is dying away!

"Luty is not alone," Luther observed to his young friend in a whisper. "This old roof covers Sim at this moment, and I suspect many others. Let's try and get around the hut; maybe we shall stumble upon a chink somewhere that will let out the secret. Don't be afraid of a sortie. I have a notion they are a little too fond of their cover to leave it, until pressed by absolute necessity to do so."

They found it a rather difficult task to carry out Luther's proposal; difficult because of the thorns and gooseberry-trees that then overspread, in their wild luxuriance, the small garden. These caught them in their prickly arms, and scratched, and plucked and pulled them back, as if it was to them of the utmost importance that the progress of the intruders should be

arrested, and the mystery that hovered about the Roughts continue unsolved. At length they came to a small patch of a window, blinded by a thick, coarse rag, which betrayed the existence of another apartment, and the presence of numerous occupants. Here was something; a key, perhaps, that would unlock the secret. This rag, either on account of some constitutional defect, or some unskilful adjustment, did not, unfortunately for those within, cover the whole of the window, but left a considerable margin on one side. And it so happened that this margin commanded a view of the fire and those grouped about it.

Now it is unnecessary that we solemnly affirm that Luther and Robert alternately applied themselves pretty closely to so opportune an opening into so curious a retreat. It was quite natural for them to do so. Hence had the reader been then and there present, he would have seen first one face and then the other at the window; each in turn streaked with a broad, perpendicular line of light, formed by the margin in question. In that line of light, he would have seen a glistening, eager, rolling eye, taking note of things that filled the soul which gazed through it with curious and stirring questions. That eye beheld a repulsive group of men, and yet it could only skirt the assemblage which the place contained; for three luminous spots were to be seen on the old rag, formed no doubt by lighted candles, each the centre of some small circle or company intent on some amusement or pursuit. Near to the fire and opposite the window, were two apparently strong, weather-beaten, ferocious men. Each wore a wide coat made of coarse velveteen, with openings at the sides that gaped much more like panniers than pockets. One of them sat with his heavy head bent forwards and his brawny arms folded on his broad chest, as if disposed to doze. A gun was reared against the bench on which he sat, and at his feet was a dog. His companion also had a gun, but was not sleeping, nor feigning sleep. He appeared to find enough to interest himself in now poisoning his gun carelessly on his open hand, and in now glancing askance at a young man who lay stretched out in front of the fire apparently asleep.

This young man had that about him which was well calculated to attract and rivet attention. His face and form were interesting, and altogether of a superior cast. One eye appeared to have received recently a blow, for it was encircled by a black border. His long, dark hair, which could hardly have been visited for weeks by comb or brush, hung all dishevelled about his brow and face. As he lay in the red glow of the hot fire, apparently wholly indifferent to the scene and society about him, the young men could not help thinking that he must be some one who, from an elevated station in life, had been dragged by the hand of evil into a degradation in which he found no pleasure, and from whose hated presence he sought to escape in sleep. There was also another man whose mien was by no means indigenous to the Roughs, nor indeed to the more polished outskirts of M——. They could not, however, scrutinise him well, as he presented to them only his profile. He appeared sharp, nimble, and knowing. He held in his hand a paper, at which he would look for a few minutes, and then throw his gaze up to old Luty's roof, as if solving some great problem furnished by the page before him.

At the farther end of the apartment, they could just see a segment as it were of a round table. A party was seated at it. Some game was in progress, and some stimulant was being rather freely imbibed. The faces of those commanded by the margin of window, Robert and Luther could not see; but the posture and motions of one enveloped in a large coat, reminded them forcibly of Simeon Sykes. Indeed, they had not doubted that it was Simeon from the first moment of seeing him. He was deeply absorbed in what was going on before him; and very much did his young friends grieve that such should be the case.

O Simeon Sykes! that it should come to this! That thou shouldst place thyself in the power of men who cannot do less than ruin thy peace and steal thy purse! Better would it be for thee, were a destroying angel to rise from the ground beneath thee, and with some ministry of vengeance and wrath, drive thee in greatest consternation to thy home, than that thou shouldst loiter in such a haunt! Better that the cards

clenched by thy hand should be turned each into a scorpion, wreathing thy fingers with their hated forms, and wringing thy frame with their maddening stings, than that thou shouldst go forward in the path into which thou hast allowed thyself to be allured! O that thou hadst an eye to see that serpent of evil that is gaining such fatal power over thee! That thou hadst a sense to feel the creeping of its crushing folds! That thou wert discerning enough to discover that thy pleasures are but the titillations of its slimy joints in their progress towards a fatal embrace! Every joy thus marks an accession of power over thee on the part of evil; the gaining of another step in its upward march towards a complete and ruinous dominion!

The very natural question, What shall we do next? was just rising to young Morgan's lips, when a voice, that could not have been many yards from them, suddenly called out,—

"Gate! A horseman asks to be shown across the Roughs!"

The young men were a little startled. Their first thought was of flight: their second, of concealment.

"He's a bold rider," Luther observed, in a whisper, as they sank down between two broad gooseberry trees, "who ventures over the Roughs such a night as this! A firm hand and a wary eye may soon be baffled here. I should vote him to have more courage than prudence."

"Hist!" Morgan replied. "The men with the guns rise. I can see them. It's small service they'll render either man or beast, except it be to lead them down into old Davy's delf! I would sooner stumble over every rock on the Roughs, than accept of the guidance of such men. But what is that? Not the men surely! Prey or plunder are not usually sought after that rattling fashion."

It was the men though. They had gained the door, and finding it fastened, were tugging at it with considerable impatience. The circumstance soon attracted the attention of the company, when a cry was raised of "Spies!" followed by general confusion, in the midst of which lights were extinguished, and many threats and imprecations uttered, that had a very direct bearing indeed upon the daring offenders.

Luther and Robert began to deem their situation somewhat unenviable, and to think that however it might be with the horseman, they certainly had displayed much more courage than prudence. This surmise acquired all the force of a conviction when they saw the old rag pulled down, and a coarse face bring its eyes close to the frail window; and when, at the same time, they heard a proposal to scour the Roughs, in order to capture the sneaks, and visit them with prompt revenge. The proposal was not, however, carried out. The horseman having unfastened the door, and assured them that he had seen no one, they all, excepting the two men with the guns and dog, re-entered the cottage. What the young men had thought would be a mischievous encounter, proved a very friendly meeting. He who had cried "Gate!" was no horseman; nor were they with guns exactly highwaymen. They spoke together in hurried words, of many things; of "game" and "keepers," of nets and snares, and of one whom the horseman, it appeared, had that evening been trying to inveigle into a state of deep inebriety. And his artifices, it appeared to the young men, had been followed by no little success; for he declared, respecting some Scott, that he was at that moment unable to tell a fence from a fog, or his fowling-piece from a hedge-stake. He had a notion it would be nearer noon than midnight when his senses returned to do duty. This was received by his companions with a laugh, just as the three were quitting Luty's garden. Soon they were gone, and the sound of their voices was inaudible to the listeners; but not sooner than those listeners desired. They had begun to be anxious to be at home, but not more anxious than those waiting for them were to see them. Anxiety and curiosity were blended in the case of Mrs. Lee. Luther's appearance relieved the former, but his replies to her questions did not satisfy the latter. The reason was, that Robert and he had resolved upon a course, in regard to what they had seen, which imposed upon them the strictest silence.



## CHAPTER IV.

## TWO PATRIOTS.

LUTHER and Robert allowed winter to pass, without disclosing what they had seen on the Roughts. To this they were moved by several considerations. Regard to their own safety was amongst the most powerful, though not by any means the most worthy. They had no doubt that injury in one form or another would be sure to overtake them, if once it became known, or even whispered, that they had been so daring as to tamper with Luty's door, or to pry into any part of his dwelling.

Luther, however, with a zeal stimulated by what he had seen, earnestly remonstrated with Simeon several times on his clandestine movements, and it appeared to him, not altogether in vain. He was less frequently out till late, but not less harsh or reserved in a general way. In all essential respects, the month of May found him what the month of December had witnessed him to be, entangled in the toils of companions he would not avow,—the victim of habits he would not confess. Not so the village. It was by no means the same at the close, that it was at the commencement, of winter. A change had come over it. Mr. Sykes, of the Farmstead, observed it with deep sorrow. The hand-loom weavers had grown much poorer; and here and there he heard low murmurs of discontent, like to the first moanings of some rising storm. The winter had been to them a hard one. Provisions had been high, and their wages tending downwards. Mr. Errton had made reduction after reduction with the same pretext, until the weavers had come to hate the name of "power-looms," and to vow destruction to them.

He observed, also, many things of a moral kind that pained

him much. One was an evident decline of respect for the Sabbath. The villagers had not at any time come up to his wishes in their use of the Sabbath. They had regarded it too much as a day set apart for mere indolence; too little as a means of spiritual quickening and training. Their abuse of it, however, had been in a great measure concealed, as if a conviction of duty neglected made them ashamed. Now, however, in the case of many, it was undisguised. Nay, they even appeared to parade this profanation of the day as something manly and independent. Mr. Sykes had met them in groups several times on Sabbath mornings, unwashed, and in their every-day attire; some amusing themselves with vulgar jests, others reading to their companions from what appeared to be small periodicals. He had remonstrated with them twice or thrice on the unseemliness of their conduct. In reply, they pertly avowed antipathy to churches and chapels; advocated the appropriation of the Sabbath to purposes of amusement and pleasure; and manifested a very unfriendly feeling towards the more respectable classes of society.

All this bowed down the spirit of Mr. Sykes, and caused him to groan like one in cruel bondage. For he desired to see his country flourish, and the several classes of society live in the affections of one another. So much did it weigh upon his mind, that he often made the condition of the village a topic of conversation. He did so one evening, in the early part of May, at the old school-house. Happening to be alone with Abel Morgan, he observed, after other matters had been talked about,—

“It pains me very much, Abel, to witness so much discontent in our little village, and so much dissatisfaction with things in general. I fear it may grow to something rather serious.”

“I fear the same, Mr. Sykes,” Abel replied.

“Do you think,” Mr. Sykes went on, “that anything could be done in the way of improving matters? I am ready to take my share, and more than my share, of such a work. I should like to see the village as it was a few years ago.”

“Something *might* be done, certainly,” Abel replied, “but it would require the co-operation of those who, I suspect, would

be unwilling to lend a helping hand. If you could bring wages back to what they were a short time ago, and expel the filthy literature that is now infesting and corrupting the homes of the weavers, you would be in a fair way for effecting your desired reform. But I have no hope. To the former part of the remedy, Mr. Errton would give no ear; and the latter part, the weavers themselves would oppose. At any rate, they would do so so long as the former remained unadopted."

"I don't see," Mr. Sykes observed in a tone of regret, "that wages for hand-loom weaving can be raised, or even kept up at what they are. Even honest manufacturers will find it necessary to make large reductions, if things flow on long at their present rate. Such as Mr. Errton will compel them to it. I rejoice to know that there are many who would rather not—who want to see their work-people do well—but they must either follow to a certain extent, or give up trade. I may say to you, Abel, that having been in this branch of business, and continuing, though I suppose from the mere force of habit, to attend market, I felt at liberty to speak to Mr. Errton on the subject of his frequent and unwarranted abatements of wages. I pointed out the bad feeling it was exciting, as well as the injury it was doing to the morals of the people, and the suffering it was inflicting upon them. I received nothing but abuse. I was even upbraided with being an enemy of his, a crime of which I am sure I am innocent, and told not to carry my head so high, as in that case I should feel the change the less, when I came to have to stoop. As to the morals of the people, he cared nothing. He didn't belong to those who made money by pretending to tinker the morals of others. I have the satisfaction of knowing, that he is not by any means a fair specimen of the manufacturers who frequent the market."

"I am sorry to hear this, Mr. Sykes, but I am not taken by surprise. It is what I have seen in the distance for some time; and it goes to show the truth of what I have said to the weavers on the subject of machinery, as well as the wisdom of the counsels I have given to them. It must be, I have said, that weaving by hand will die out. It is in the necessary course of things. The inventions of genius will encroach upon

manual labour of every description. They will supplant such labour, manufacturing our apparel and cultivating our fields. They will leave for the operative classes such callings only as demand mind and thought, the pen and pencil, which, I hope, may be abundant. Hence, I have said, get knowledge. It will prepare you for what is approaching. As machinery encroaches upon your present occupations, you will be qualified to step into higher and more remunerative spheres of labour."

"It pleases me to learn, Abel, that you have given them such sound counsel. You deserve well of your country for it. It will do them much more good than inflaming their discontent. But waiving the question of wages and machinery at present, can nothing else be done to mend matters? If I construe your language correctly, you just now hinted that the literature of the weavers had something to do, in your opinion, with the present state of things. Might not that be supplanted by something of a more healthy and salutary description?"

"I do think," Abel replied, "that the mischief is to be connected instrumentally with that literature. At least to a considerable extent. I believe it to have been in this way. The reckless reduction of their wages excited discontent. Certain parties, ever on the look-out for such markets at which to vend their goods, then poured in a host of publications advocating rebellion; denouncing every class above the working class; recommending distrust of the clergy as the abettors of their oppressors; painting quite a millennium for the labourer as the reward of revolution; and supplying immoral tales, for leisure hours, that cannot do less than corrupt whomsoever they reach. Oh, surely such reckless writers cannot be aware of the full extent of the harm they do! Could they follow the printed page, and see it, as I have done, commit its ravages, surely they would hesitate to send out such agents of evil! Not alone do they affect the dissatisfied. Others are injured by them. I have known cheerful industry drop its tools, and forsake the path of honest toil, because persuaded by such publications that plenty might be obtained by revolution! I have

seen the contented tiller of the soil transformed into a snarling cur, to whom murder would have been no distasteful work, by such publications persuading him that rents and taxes are foul exactions, and those who cheerfully pay them contemptible slaves! I have observed the once devoted worshipper of God allured by such publications from his pew, and led to lounge, on a bright Sabbath morn, under the hedges of green fields, where herded the drunkard and the sluggard, the liar and the libertine, feasting their lusts with some romance of passion, or firing their revenge with some wild harangue on revolution! Yes, I do connect the present state of things with that pest. But as to removing it, I do not think that practicable at present. The weaver loves it too much to allow himself to be deprived of it. The reason of that is obvious. It pities his distresses; condoles with him as an injured man; excuses his follies; and paints to him a glorious day, whose rising beams it already discerns on his dark and troubled horizon. Ah me! Those beams over which so many hearts are now doting! What are they? The glare of the agitator's midnight torch craftily thrown upwards, and then hailed by him as the herald of a bright future, whose advent is to bring holiday and plenty to the labouring man! The lurid reflection of incandious fires, kindled by the inflaming oratory of juggling demagogues! A huge fiction, a heartless device; that pays the reckless scribe, and brings men and money to the standard of political hucksterers!"

The latter part of Abel's reply must be regarded as a sort of soliloquy; for it was clear to Mr. Sykes that he had become quite oblivious of his presence. His eyes were fixed upon the fire before him, and his thoughts were doubtless far away amongst the delusive pledges of a better time which he so warmly, but honestly denounced. After a brief silence, Mr. Sykes observed,—

"I am sorry, Abel, that between us we have made it out that nothing can at present be done. It will only cause me to think more, however, of a project I had begun to entertain. I see something of the sort must be done. Your son Robert is a nice lad, I think, Abel! It appears to me a great pity that

he should be kept at an employment that is so rapidly becoming unremunerative."

Abel Morgan felt an interest in Mr. Sykes's project at once; but when his son's name was mentioned, his interest in it became more lively, for he naturally concluded that Robert was connected with it in Mr. Sykes's thoughts.

"It is kind in you, Mr. Sykes," he promptly observed, "taking any interest in my son, and especially, coveting for him some more permanent and more remunerative occupation. This leads me to remark, and you must excuse my freedom, that if those who can, would thus come forward to the help of the working man when struggling against machinery, we should pass through the changes it brings about more quietly, and with less bad feeling, than is now the case."

"And your remark leads me to observe, Abel," Mr. Sykes returned, with a little extra emphasis, "that so far as I know, there is every disposition amongst the more affluent classes of society to help the less fortunate. The reason, I am sure, of any apparent backwardness is, a conviction that help, in the way of true elevation, is not desired. I offer to help your son, because I see he wishes to rise."

"And I assure you, Mr. Sykes, that were this generally known, the readiness of such to assist the operative in improving and elevating himself, would be often appealed to. It appears that the latter does the former an injustice, and himself a great wrong!"

"Well, Abel, I can only repeat that I am confident it is as I say. I could give you the names of scores of gentlemen who at this moment are ready—wishful—to co-operate with the working classes, in efforts to improve them morally, intellectually, and socially."

"Then I see," Abel began, like one talking to himself. Mr. Sykes liked to hear Abel Morgan in this mood, for then indeed did there often escape from him the utterances of true wisdom. "I see what is wanted in order to a better state of things! It is a larger and more correct acquaintance with one another on the part of the several grades of society. I have got the solution of a distressing social problem! The upper classes, by

such acquaintance, will learn that the lower are wishful to receive assistance in the line of true progress, and then they will doff off their reserve, and cheerfully lend them a helping hand! Then the lower will see that they are not despised, and will throw away envy and discontent! Here is what will bridge over the breaches that now exist! Mr. Sykes," here he lifted his beaming eyes from the fire to that gentleman's face, "I have got what has cost me hours of anxious thought! I see how we may all become brethren!"

Yes, Abel! thy heart then embraced what the writer of these pages believes to be the solution of a problem, that he well knows long distressed thee. Much would mutual acquaintance do for the high and the low in the way of exciting mutual respect. Easy and respectable circumstances, and struggling, but honest poverty, were made acquainted with each other in the persons of William Sykes and thyself; and the result was, esteem and gratitude on thy part, kind patronage, esteem and help on his part. And when men come generally thus to know one another, then will they seek to be of service to one another. The elevated will find that there are hearts yearning after virtue in the lowest conditions of life; and the needy will find that there are hands ready to help in the mansion of the merchant and the palace of the peer. Oh, then, let us have faith in one another! Faith removes mountains; the mountains that in real life keep men divided one from another!

Mr. Sykes, after a few general observations, again tried to turn the conversation to young Morgan.

"Your son appears very thoughtful and steady, Abel."

"No doubt he will appear so to one of your discernment, Mr. Sykes. He is very steady and very thoughtful." Mr. Morgan again fell into his soliloquising mood, and it was with deep interest that Mr. Sykes listened to him whilst he went on as follows:—"There is a great difference in young men as regards the exercise of the reflective faculty. Some exercise it much more than others. There are those who see, and hear, and eat, and laugh, and talk, and who seem to do hardly anything else. From everything in the shape of mental work they appear cautiously to abstain. The events of life pass over

them without making any impression ; as does quicksilver over the face of a mirror, or the shadow of a summer-cloud across the face of a rock. Then there are those who will be constantly putting this and that together ; who retire into corners to do so, and lie awake upon their beds ; who will not or who cannot allow events to pass unheeded, but think and think, until they come to cherish quite a parental solicitude for them. To the latter class my son belongs. Do not suppose that I like it. I do not like it. This much-thinking is a sort of seriousness that is often the forerunner of something really serious. Deep currents of thought will cut wide channels in a youthful frame, just as heavy streams of water will cause sad havoc in flowing through beds of soft earth. Such currents, like all streams, are charged with a sediment ; that sediment too often is the strength, the laughter, the happiness of the youth through whose being they flow. The waters wear away the stones ; and thoughts, not unfrequently by their abrasion, lay bare the roots of life. Let me not be misunderstood. I do not deem my son a great thinker. A youth—nay more, a man—may have a habit of reflecting, and yet do nothing at all remarkable in that line ; just as an individual may be very fussy, without bringing into existence any very particular result. I do not suppose that my son's thoughts are of that lofty kind that disdain to associate with the common herd ; something eagle-like, that must be up in the highest regions ; that can no more feel at home in the creeds and systems of men, than can the wild bird of the mountains in the iron cage into which the fowler thrusts it. No. They are, I believe, modest, perhaps contemptible, certainly busy affairs, reminding one of the swallow as their befitting emblem, rather than the king of the feathered tribe. They are constantly at work in their way ; now skimming the surface of this subject, and now paying a pop visit to that ; one moment darting up into mid-air, with sundry superfluous gyrations, as if conscious of the notice of everybody, and in another, coming down with all the assumption of one vast, fell swoop, upon—an insect."

The time having arrived for Mr. Sykes to depart, he reluctantly interrupted Abel Morgan at this point, to say good



night. Mr. Sykes had other questions respecting Robert Morgan pressing upon his lips, but the soliloquising mood of Abel caused him to reserve them for some other time. They parted good friends,—better friends than ever. As Abel returned into the old school-house, he solemnly declared to himself that Mr. Sykes was a real gentleman and no mistake; and that he was even entitled to be considered something of a mathematician, inasmuch as he had solved for him a most difficult problem. Mr. Sykes, too, on his way home, appeared as if he had received a solution to some problem. “It must be so,” he observed almost audibly to himself. “That thoughtfulness points that way most clearly. The project must be nursed into a reality. I feel that God will smile upon it.”

Robert was, as his father had said, “of a thoughtful turn.” Latterly he had become very thoughtful, sad even at times; and it might be that his father had observed this, and that the fact had moved him to speak disapprovingly and apprehensively of much thinking. Neither he nor his daughter, however, could divine the cause of the melancholy that seemed at times to steal over him. The latter observed that his sleep was troubled, for she heard him moan often, and that he appeared to relish much less than usual both his meals and books. She had observed even more decided indications of sadness. She had detected a tear in his eye, when she well knew that the book which he seemed to be reading was in no way calculated to call one forth; and one evening, a short time before Mr. Sykes’s visit just mentioned, coming upon him unexpectedly, she had seen and heard what convinced her that he must be very unhappy. He was reclining at the open window of his chamber; one hand supporting his head, the other playing mechanically with the old ivy that hung thickly around. It was a calm, sweet evening, and yet it appeared that his heavy heart could find no more suitable words in which to express itself, than the following :—

“O death! the poor man’s dearest friend,  
The kindest and the best!  
Welcome the hour my weary limbs  
Are laid with thee at rest.

The great, the wealthy, fear thy blow,  
From pomp and pleasure torn ;  
But oh ! a blest relief to those,  
Who, weary-laden, mourn ! ”

Robert had made no mention of his sadness to his sister, nor had he in any way hinted at it in the presence of Luther Lee. The latter had observed it, however, as will appear from a conversation we shall presently report. The conversation was held one evening in the middle of May, in the tidy sitting-room of a neat cottage in M——. The cottage was Mrs. Lee's ; the parties between whom the conversation took place were that lady and her son. Luther had been that day to the market ; and, as was his wont for some time on such occasions, was sipping in easy mood his tea, and playing with, rather than really reading, a book. We ought here to state, that Luther, by the influence and at the express wish of his Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead, had become connected with a small manufacturing firm near to M——, for the purpose of getting an initiation into the worsted trade in a general way. The firm did not do much business, and as Luther was quick and apt at learning, he was not under the necessity of spending much time either in the mill, the counting-house, or the market. Hence he had an easy life of it, and much leisure for other pursuits. As we have already stated, Luther, just prior to the commencement of the conversation we are about to notice, was loitering over his tea, much less inclined to converse with the author he held in his hand, than with his mother, who had just joined him. Mrs. Lee had taken her needle, and so arranged the multifarious contents of her work-basket, as to bring them all within easy reach. She had a number of fancy articles in hand, intended for a bazaar that was about to be held in a neighbouring village, to aid in the erection of a Sunday school. At these she had worked a great deal during the winter. Seeing her at them again, led Luther naturally to observe, having no correct idea of the tedious character of such work,—

“What, mother! haven't you finished those things yet? It appears to me you have been at them all the winter. If you

were to charge for your time after the rate of some people, I've a notion you would swamp the whole concern! I think, mother, it would be better for me to build them a school right off, and paint it both inside and out, than give them as much time as you have done!"

Now Mrs. Lee knew well enough how to estimate the banter of her son. She perceived that he was in a talking humour, and regarded what he said as an easy method of feeling his way to something he desired to say to her. Now she had something to say to *him*; and deeming it possible that he might wish to take her away in quite another direction, she decided to say it at once; especially as it admitted of being shaped into a reply to his observations. So she said,—

"But what will you say, Luther, when I tell you that they still require weeks of work, and that your cousin Hilda is coming for a few days to assist me in giving to them the finishing touches?"

"I'll say I'm glad, mother! Hilda is always welcome here. But when did that bit of precious intelligence come?"

"I received her note this morning, and she comes on Tuesday."

"Oh, dear!" Luther observed suddenly, as if something had hit him. "That's a drawback, though! I was just going to ask you to be kind enough to hold one of your Tract or Bible meetings on Tuesday afternoon, and give the room up to me and Robert Morgan. We were going to have a regular spell at geology. Uncle Sykes has bought me a host of what are called 'geological specimens,' which are to come this week; and I had arranged with young Morgan to come and give me a sort of introductory lecture on the science."

"But how is it, Luther," Mrs. Lee asked, as she sought in her work-basket for a thread of worsted, "that Robert Morgan teaches you geology?"

"Because he understands it, and I don't," was Luther's frank reply.

"But I cannot see why that should be, my lad," she replied. "You have had much more schooling than Robert, and have now many more opportunities. I don't see why he should understand it any better than you do."

"Whether you see it or not, he does. The fact is, mother, the Morgans seem to know things by a sort of instinct. It is by what old Abel calls intuition. They never appear to me to labour for what they know. Whilst such as I have to work our way up to acquaintance with any particular branch of knowledge by a series of toilsome steps, they appear to go right to it without any intervening stages, as if they stepped thither at once, or went on wings. There's Lucy Morgan, now. I'll be bound for it she would put such touches on to those things of yours, as neither you nor cousin Hilda can. I have seen some of the most splendid needlework done by her."

"I think you see a great deal at that old school-house, Luther! Rather too much!"

Luther looked to see if his mother was smiling, for her face was partially averted. No. She was serious, and even a little heightened in colour. He had gone too far. He had a great abhorrence of anything like undue familiarity in a son towards his parents; and in a general way was ready at discerning the least tendency in that direction. Hence he felt instant regret.

"Well, to be serious, mother," he resumed, "I should like Robert Morgan to come for the afternoon, as much for his own sake as mine. He is rather low in spirits of late, and I want to cheer him up a little."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Lee observed. "I am very sorry to hear that. He can come, my lad, with my full consent. I am glad to hear you hint at such a commendable motive. Always look to the good of others as well as your own pleasure or profit. Hilda can easily step on to her father's until morning."

"Stay, mother! We could get done by tea-time, and all sit down together. It would cheer Morgan up a little to be in Hilda's company an hour. She carries sunshine wherever she goes."

Mrs. Lee was silent for a minute, as if pondering something. She then broke the silence by an emphatic, "No, Luther! that must not be for many reasons!"

Who was Hilda?

The next chapter must answer that question.

## CHAPTER V.

## ANSWERS THE QUESTION, "WHO WAS HILDA?"

HILDA was the eldest daughter of Thomas and Dinah Sykes. She was a laughing, light-hearted, but modest and virtuous, young woman. Of course she had failings; but she had withal such a frank, easy way of confessing and deploring them, that Luther Lee actually liked to see them appear, just because of the better and beautiful dispositions they were sure to bring out. He used to say that the appearance of those dispositions far more than compensated for any pain her failings had caused him. We have met more than once with such a combination of infirmities and excellences, and have thanked God for them. Being imperfect creatures, we are prone to wound one another by our follies and waywardness; but we are so constituted and circumstanced, that we may, if we will, amply compensate one another by frank, easy, genuine confessions and apologies. We may, we can, distil a balm, that shall more than kill any sting we may have given; a balm, that shall so ease and soothe the irritation, as to cause men almost to covet the latter, that they may experience the sweet pleasure of the former. Oh, then, let us not be backward to acknowledge and deplore our failures in duty! There is moral beauty in true penitence, and in honest endeavours to correct errors of conduct. The sight of such beauty gives joy to angels!

Perhaps Hilda's redeeming features of mind and ways derived a little interest, in Luther's eyes, from her personal charms; for a sweet disposition will derive interest from sweet looks and a sweet face, just as the central figure of a picture will appear all the more beautiful, when the several objects around it, and in the background, are artistically grouped and properly pencilled. She had soft, auburn hair; a round, and rather ruddy face, which could assume at any time an

expression of great thoughtfulness; pale-blue eyes, a small, pursing mouth, and a lithe, nimble frame, that might have grown a little more without shooting much above the average stature of her sex. Hilda Sykes had grown up, in almost every respect, a contrast to her mother. Perhaps this was owing in part to the fact that she had been brought up by Mrs. Lee. That female had had the responsibility of forming her tastes and habits, of superintending her education and domestic training. Mr. Lee, her deceased husband, had been very fond of Hilda Sykes. He even appeared sometimes, to his wife, to prefer her to their own son. Since his death, Hilda had lived with a younger brother of his at H——, in whose family she at this time occupied a responsible, but respectable, position. She was allowed frequently to visit M——, and to stay for several days at a time, now with her mother, and now with Mrs. Lee. Mr. Sykes also, of the Farmstead, was very fond of Hilda. Indeed it was generally believed that he had been the first to desire to place her under the care of his sister, and that he had been at the expense of her being kept there. This we do know—that he did a great deal for Hilda; that he was always consulted in regard to any important movement made by or with a reference to her; and that he told Abel Morgan that Hilda was not a little indebted to him for what she had gained and for what she had become. He seemed rather proud of what he had done for her, or at least grateful for what he had been able to do. We know that he once expressed himself after this fashion, to Mr. Morgan,—

“What a happy thing, Abel, that we secured for her the advantages she has had! Had she continued at home, she would no doubt have been like the rest of my brother Thomas’s children, and all the good qualities we now see would have lain beneath thick layers of ignorance and neglect. We don’t know what sleeps in the human mind, until it is really roused up! What coruscations that gem may flash upon the eye, until it is rightly cut, and thoroughly polished! Oh, it is painful to think what wonderful talents and capabilities may even now be lying torpid, because never having felt the quickening touch of culture! What wondrous mental vestures may

at this moment be folded up, the mould of error upon them, the rusty girdle of vice around them! Vestures whose beauty, if unfolded, might attract the admiring eye of royalty, and call forth the hearty plaudits of the populace! We see what excellencies would have been sepulchred and lost, in the case of Hilda, had she not been brought up in the way she has been! It is no wild freak of the imagination, Abel, to conceive of the world of mind as having its fossils, as you say is the case with the world of matter. Only this difference should be observed: the fossils embedded in the earth's strata are the dead remains of irrational creatures, whilst the fossils of mind are sleeping principles that outweigh worlds in value. Oh, for the zeal of the geologist, to penetrate the filthy dens of our large towns, and to explore the busy haunts of pollution and sin, that precious *deposits* may be brought forth from the beds of darkness, and made to shine like stars in the firmament!"

Luther was not without hope that his mother would relent, and allow him to witness the effect which his cousin's vivacity might have on Robert Morgan. But no, she remained firm; and Luther was all the more sorry she had done so, when, on the Tuesday, he observed the dejection of Robert.

"I cannot," he observed to his mother on the Wednesday afternoon, as they sat expecting Hilda, "I cannot read that young Socrates. I tried to cheer him up by every means in my power; but no go. I saw he made an effort to be cheerful, but I think it would almost be possible to get as much genuine mirth out of a mummy, as I got out of him; which means, of course, that I got none. I could see that when he forgot himself, his flimsy semblance of hilarity vanished, and a sadness, like unto the gathering shadows of evening, stole over his face."

"I think, Luther," Mrs. Lee replied, "it is by no means difficult to suggest one probable secret of Robert's sadness. The Morgans, I believe, are getting poorer, and may not that be weighing on Robert's mind?"

"I hope not, mother. I am sure I couldn't eat a meal, if I thought the Morgans hadn't one."

"I much admire your tenderness of heart, my dear. And it

would much embitter my portion to think that any one was really starving. I do not say this is the case with your friends; nevertheless it may be, and I believe is, the case, that they are growing poorer. The wages of hand-loom weavers are now declining, and Abel's school is falling off, so that it can hardly be otherwise with them."

Luther was at once stricken with sadness; with a sadness heavy as that which, on the preceding day, had in that room rested on the spirits of his young friend. He saw at once, with the ready intuition of the loving heart, how the case stood. And oh! that was a noble sight, and one on which God doubtless looked smilingly down—the sight of that generous youth, asking himself, with thoughtful countenance and troubled heart, "What can *I* do for them? How can *I* help the promoters of my social pleasures, in this the day of their need?" Well is it for honest poverty, and highly does the God over all approve, when the notes of its sad wail thus fall on the ear of affluence!

"Mother," he observed, after a short silence, more like one thinking aloud, than like one speaking, "I should like to help them. I think I could do something."

"My dear, I admire such an impulse, but I think it would not be proper for you to yield to it at present. Your motive might not be understood in the village, and Abel Morgan might not like to receive help from one so young. Do not distress yourself. Your uncle Sykes of the Farmstead will not neglect an old friend like Abel Morgan. But no more of this at present. Here is Hilda."

But it was not the laughing, light-hearted Hilda. She was sober and sad; and even her cousin's attempts to betray her, for his own pleasure, into merry laughter, signally failed. Mrs. Lee, a careful observer of manners and things, at once perceived that something was wrong, and that the tender, sensitive spirit of Hilda, had received a wound which was then unhealed. So, when alone with their work after tea, Mrs. Lee, without any apology, alluded to what she had noticed in her niece.

"I think, Hilda," she commenced, "you are far from being so



lively to-day as is your wont. There is nothing wrong at home, I hope. All seemed much the same when I left you last night."

Hilda blushed; admitted that she wasn't in very high spirits, but said she had had no quarrel with any one. There was a brief pause, after which Mrs. Lee attempted to turn the conversation into another channel. It did not flow, however, and there was another pause as a matter of course. At length Hilda, as if yielding to an impulse she could no longer restrain, observed,—

"It is no use, aunt, trying to take any more time to consider about it. I feel I must be so inconsiderate and selfish, as to inflict upon you an account of the little sadness you say you have observed."

Of course, it was all right to Mrs. Lee, and was, in promise at least, no infliction, but an indulgence.

"It is what I have lately seen and heard of my brother Simeon, in connection with a dream I had last night, that pains me and makes me appear sad. Aunt, do you believe in dreams?"

"Of course, my dear," her aunt replied, "I believe that there are such things as dreams."

"Yes, aunt, we all believe that in sleep we dream. I don't ask if you believe in dreams viewed in that light."

"I don't know that, Hilda. You and I may; but if one may rely upon a book your cousin was reading the other evening, there are those who would not agree with you there. I don't trouble my head, nor do I wish to trouble yours, with what the writer of that book calls metaphysical questions. But I may just observe, that he gives it as his opinion that dreams occur when the mind is in a transition state between waking and sleeping. By transition state, he means, I presume, the state of passing from one to the other."

"Well, aunt, that remark is to some purpose, after all. I thought, just after what I call my dream was over, that I had not been right fast and hard asleep. But on thinking it over, I concluded that I must have been, for this simple reason, that we dream only in sleep. I believe now, however, that I was

not right asleep. And I am glad to think so. I do not fear a dream of that sort, although it may be an unpleasant one, half so much as those that come in right sleep. Right dreams, aunt, sometimes come to pass. At least, I believe so."

"Pooh! my dear, don't torment yourself with such notions. But what is it all about? What have you seen or heard of your brother? And what is this freak of fancy which you call a dream? I should like to know. May be, I can ease your mind a little."

"Well, aunt, I have seen and heard a great deal respecting my brother; a great deal that I don't like. He seems to me to be getting very petulant and coarse. I fear that he is piercing father and mother through with many sorrows. They tell me that he is now very irregular in his conduct generally. Father suspects that he associates with low companions; and mother fears that he is fast wasting his money. She says there will soon be nothing left of his 'bank in the balk,' if he be allowed to go on as he has done lately. And you may be sure, aunt, such an apprehension as that, is quite a thorn in the flesh to mother."

Perhaps the reader does not know what is meant by a "bank in the balk." For his information, then, we state, that it is money secreted in some beam or rafter of the house. Most of the farm-houses in Yorkshire have been liberally furnished with such roof supports, left, in the majority of instances, unconcealed; and the practice has long and successfully obtained, of stowing money away in them. They usually present a considerable surface, which affords, in connection with their numerous joints and angles, amazing facilities for such a practice. These banks defy, in a general way, the arts of the most expert burglars. We ourselves once heard the owner of such a deposit defy a companion of his to discover it; and heard the individual, after swinging himself from rafter to rafter, like a mischievous monkey amongst the wide boughs of a fruit-tree, confess himself unable to find the hidden treasure. This mode of hoarding up money has been much encouraged amongst their children by thrifty fathers and mothers. Dinah Sykes very much encouraged it. "A bank in the balk" was

everything with her. Simeon was carefully taught by her, amongst his first lessons, to wrap in an old rag a few pence his uncle had given him, and stow them away in a hole, in one of the balks of the children's bed-chamber. The growth of Simeon's bank she anxiously watched and aided, for many years. The appearance in it of an additional sovereign was quite an event to her; something like the discovery of a new planet to an astronomer. Hence Hilda's observation, that the wasting of his bank would be a thorn in the flesh to her mother.

"Between ourselves," Mrs. Lee remarked, "your mother teaches Simeon to think a great deal too much of that bank. I fear she has never told him that there are things infinitely more precious than money, and that he should be careful to look higher than the balk in which he hides it. But what about the dream, Hilda?"

"Oh, aunt! I can hardly tell. But I'll just give you the substance of it in a few words. You see I went to my bed late and low in spirits; for I had sat up talking about Simeon, and waiting to see him come in. Being rather troubled, and feeling rather lonely, I sat down beside the children's bed, and began thinking about different things. I suppose I then went off in a kind of doze, when I had what I call my dream. I dreamt that Simeon came in late, and that mother reproved him in harsh words for it; that they then began to quarrel, when she upbraided him with spending the money she had helped him to save, and told him that he would soon be nothing better than a beggarly scholar, with no money to buy even a trashy book. Simeon then took her, according to my dream, to his 'bank in the balk,' where, he said, he could prove to her full satisfaction, that her charges were unjust and her fears groundless. From a hole in the balk he drew something folded in canvass, which, as it rolled out on his open hands, sent quite a thrill through mother's frame. Her eager eyes and face were instantly on a glow, as if lit up with the reflected lustre of some luminous substance. This roll contained a bank note or two, many sovereigns, and a large, heavy gold chain. It appeared to me that the gold chain, coiled up amongst the money, struck mother as quite a transporting sight, and that she interposed

a hand to prevent Simeon disturbing it until she had feasted her eyes upon it. She then seized the sovereigns with her clutching fingers, and held them with something like a death-grasp; whilst Simeon, at her request, spread the chain on his breast, that she might see its length, be dazzled with its glitter, and calculate its value. But, oh, aunt! it seemed to me, that whilst mother, in a state of ecstasy, was complimenting my brother on his improved appearance and growing riches, the chain somehow turned into a monstrous creature, like a snake, having a thick body and a very wide mouth, with which it hissed most horribly. Brother was, of course, very much frightened as soon as he observed the change, and tried with all his might to shake it off; but as he shook himself, it twined round and round his body, each moment getting a firmer hold upon him. Mother was filled with terror, and seemed not to know what to do. At length she sprang at the foul creature as if she would tear it from its prey, when it stretched out its ugly head and open mouth, and struck her with blindness and madness. It appeared to me that then she raged and groped about for my brother until quite exhausted, when she fell on to the floor, holding the money so tightly in her clenched hand, that it cut into the palm and fingers, thus aggravating her torments, and likewise covering her fist with blood. Simeon cried not for help; but after the first shock, struggled with amazing fortitude and endurance against his fearful antagonist. Even when his bones seemed to crack beneath the tightening folds of the snake, causing mother's prostrate frame to quiver with horror, he still held out; and when it appeared that the conquering throes of death were upon him, when his face had become discoloured, his protruding eyes blood-shot, and his breathing a mere death-rattle, even then, with clenched teeth and stiffened hands, he disdained to give his powerful foe the pleasure of even a dying moan. Just as I thought myself beginning to faint away, I awoke, and found my candle dripping blistering tallow on to my hand, and one of my little sisters in a state of fright, with her arms around my neck and almost smothering me with kisses. It appeared that I had startled her with my sobbing, and that she

had rushed out of bed to wake me up. I assure you, aunt, I was both cold and stiff; so, without saying anything, I sought my bed. I didn't sleep much, however, until near morning, and have been very unhappy all day; but have kept the dream to myself until now."

"And, my dear," Mrs. Lee interposed, placing at the same time a hand softly on one of Hilda's, by way of emphasis, we suppose, "do keep it to yourself, for a little time at least. When, however, it becomes your duty, as you may think, to warn and counsel your brother, then, in a simple, sober-minded way, tell him your dream; not as believing it prophetic at all, but just to show him that such is his conduct in your view, that even in sleep its apprehended consequences haunt and trouble you in frightful forms. To me the dream is a horrid one; but of course it is nothing but a dream. Abel Morgan, perhaps, would look upon it as something more. I suspect he would regard it as symbolical of your brother's end. He doesn't consider himself a superstitious man, and yet I heard him say one evening at your uncle's, that he believed in such a thing as a premonitory intimation of some coming event. He said that he had experienced peculiar feelings previously to painful events, which he could compare to nothing but the creeping over his mind of some chilling shadow, thrown forwards by them. Even learned men have their weaknesses, and this, I think, is one of Abel's. By-the-by, Hilda, has that gentleman ever been to my brother's since, whom Simeon introduced to you? The mention of the chain in your dream has brought him to my thoughts."

"No, aunt, and I hope never will. I ascribe my dream partly to that visit. I am sure it put the chain into it. I have been quite nervous ever since. If Mr. Lee knew about it, he would order my brother from the house the very first time he comes. I am sure he would."

"It was very improper, certainly," Mrs. Lee replied. "But I very much long to know something about him. Has your brother ever mentioned him since? I inferred from what you told me, that he is a respectable person."

"Yes, aunt, brother has mentioned him once. He says that he is well off, and very respectably connected."

"I wonder who he can be, Hilda!"

Here Mrs. Lee made a short pause, and looked earnestly at her niece.

"Hilda! has Robert Morgan been since I saw you last?"

"Yes, aunt, once," her niece returned, with much frankness.

"I am grieved to hear it, Hilda. I hope you gave him no encouragement. I have nothing to say against the Morgans as neighbours, but a great deal against being drawn into any closer connection with them. Families may be advantageously connected by the tie of friendship, when it would not be well, or proper, on many accounts, to be connected by the bond of marriage. Robert Morgan is a steady, intelligent, and, I believe, pious young man; but he is poor and of a poor family, and has not therefore such prospects as one aspiring to your hand should have. He would not be able to make you comfortable, even according to his own ideas of comfort. Your cousin says he is very low at present; I presume, therefore, that he met with no success."

"He did not, aunt. But do not do him an injustice. He did not ask me to marry him, or even to stand engaged to him. He said that he saw objections to such a thing as an engagement at present. What he asked me to do, was, to promise him that I would not engage to any one for a year, and allow him to speak to me again at the expiration of that time. He trusted to be able to improve his circumstances and prospects, and to remove some of the objections which he well knew my parents would raise. He gave me very good advice; warned me against the young man my brother had introduced to me; and altogether, aunt, talked in a way that, I am sure, you would have liked. I found, aunt, that he knows, much better than you would think, how such as you and my mother look at young men in his situation. He said he knew that he was poor, but believed that he could raise himself in the world, and was determined to make the effort."

"Well, my dear, what did you say?"

"I told him he need not be afraid of my engaging myself to

any one; because, I said, I didn't think I should ever be married. I also said, that I could give no promise as to allowing him to speak to me on such a subject at the end of a year; and added, that if he managed to raise himself in life, it appeared to me he would be able to do much better than he would by obtaining my hand."

"That's nonsense, Hilda. He never would. And another thing, I've a notion he wouldn't try. I believe he is so stricken, that whatever he was to become, he would have you for a wife if you would allow it. Then do you really think he is going to do something in the way of lifting himself up? May be he is going to obtain a good situation. Or it is just possible they have heard of some money that is coming to them. Abel has a brother in India. I think, Hilda, you should have said that he might speak to you at the end of the year. You could hear what he might have to say."

"I'll tell you, aunt, that I yesterday sent him a line to say, that if he likes, he can write to me in the course of twelve months. I mean at the end. But you must not mention it for the world. If Simeon should hear of it, he will fly into a regular rage. I know he doesn't like Robert, and I believe he doesn't like Luther."

Mrs. Lee replied, that she thought her niece had done quite right; and that she had not pledged herself to anything. Consenting to hear, or offering to read, what Robert Morgan might have to state, by no means involved the obligation of doing what he might request. This latter observation was made as if to silence some voice in her own breast, for certainly Hilda had said nothing to call it forth. She also advised her niece to be very steady and cautious; reminded her that in all probability she would have many offers; that engagements and marriages were solemn things; and that she had been brought up in a way that wholly unfitted her for being a poor man's wife. She must therefore look up and wait. An apple was as easily plucked as a crab!

Mrs. Lee was one of those who attach considerable importance to a little property in such a transaction as that of marriage. She was very different in this respect from

Mr. Sykes of the Farmstead. Had the reader been with the two shortly after the foregoing conversation, he would have learnt as much. He would have heard Mr. Sykes thus express himself to his sister:—

“I do *not* ignore altogether the question of property, or money, in such a solemn transaction. I would not stand by and see those in whom I take such an interest, dragged down by the dead weight of another’s poverty, into a condition to which I well know they are in no way adapted. But, on the other hand, I do not look upon money as everything. It does not supply one essential ingredient in a happy union. Is there mutual esteem, affection, confidence? Are the tempers of the two of such a character as to promise harmony? Is it likely they would toil, if necessary, for each other—suffer for each other—forebear with each other? Look first for such things as these. They are amongst the essential elements of connubial felicity. It is from the tones of the two hearts that the harmony or discord of matrimonial life results. If they be of a character to blend, you have harmony. If they be not of a character to blend, but jar, as if repelling each other, then you have discord, which neither the splendour of palaces nor the wealth of banks, can hush. Then let us look for this sympathy of soul. The skilled musician, in judging of the capability of the instruments under his direction to yield true harmony, is not guided by their polish or price, but by their tones. Harmony, he knows, is but remotely affected by artistic finish. The former may exist without the latter. So in respect to marriage. Its harmony must flow from within. Loving hearts that beat in sympathy have the secret of connubial bliss. The tones of the temper yield its harmony or discord.”



## CHAPTER VI.

## TWO MEMBERS OF THE ANTI-SUNDAY LEAGUE.

WHEN Robert Morgan spoke to Hilda of rising in life, he had no hope of being able to do so by means of hand-loom weaving. Even had he had such a hope, the events of that summer would have clouded it entirely. It was a summer of painful strife and excitement in M——. Wages went lower, and of course the village got poorer. Dissatisfaction grew rife. The roads became dangerous, and burglaries things of more frequent occurrence. Emigration schemes were projected and much discussed; and secret societies, having in view the overthrow of the throne and machinery, were looked upon and spoken of approvingly. Political agitators gained footing this summer in M——, and liberal offerings, taken out of the scanty earnings of the weavers, were presented to fiery demagogues, for promising cheap bread and good wages, as the reward of rebellion and revolution.

Mr. Sykes was so concerned for the welfare of the village, that he ventured, contrary to the advice of his friend Abel Morgan, to present himself at a public meeting of the weavers, and to give them such counsel as in his opinion they needed. He told them plainly that they were pursuing a suicidal course in proposing to take the law into their own hands; that the increase of machinery was more likely to receive an impetus than a check, from any interference of theirs; and that in his opinion it would not turn out an unmixed evil to them in the end, but would be found to be for the good of all.

“Your sufferings may be but the birth-pangs of a higher order of things. We find that the introduction of all great changes and improvements has been accompanied by disadvantages to some portions of the community. There has been

the breaking up of the old, which is always painful; and the tedious and unwelcome process of getting used and adapted to the new. It seems to be a settled principle with the Divine Being, in his government of the world, to require men to sow in tears before reaping in joy. His greatest gift, that of life in the world to come, is obtained through much tribulation. The history of the globe on which we dwell, affords striking illustrations of this law. It has attained its present state by successive changes; each change, or fresh order of things, being something in advance of that immediately preceding it. But the introduction of the new, or superior, has ever been preceded by the destruction of the old, or inferior; a destruction that has involved the extinction of vegetable life, and much suffering to sentient creatures. Confusion and pain have marked the pathway from the old to the new. Even the new heaven and new earth of which we read, come not until the dissolution and passing away of the things that are. Such I believe to be God's method of government; and I am hoping, and wish you to do the same, that your present inconveniences and sufferings, are but as so many pangs attendant on the birth of a higher order of things; an order of things under which inanimate matter will do the drudgery of man, and leave him in ease to enjoy the fruits of his genius.

"You ask why you should suffer for others. And who suffer for your good. My friends and neighbours, I cannot answer your first question; your second is less difficult. You are not alone in such a lot. It is a law of heaven that man should suffer for the good of his fellow-man. Have you no blessings that have been purchased for you by others? Are you in no way crowned by the death of others? Have you never been healed by the stripes of others? Are you in no way benefited by the noble devotion of those brave men who, at different times, have gone out to break the wave of the invader's fury as it rolled in thunder towards our shores, and who now sleep in the depths of ocean? Are you in no way benefited by the tedious marches, the wants, the hardships, and the sufferings unto death, of those brave heroes who, in foreign lands, have fought and vanquished the foes of your

country? Do you in no way inherit blessings purchased by martyrs in prison and at the stake—in grinding exile and in lingering deaths? That tree of privilege and liberty under which you sit; whose spreading branches throw over you protection, and whose clustered fruit, like the milk of a nursing mother, yields the elements of strength and growth: who planted and tended and pruned it? Men who have long slept the sleep of death! And they did it too amid sweat and tears and blood. To nurture that tree, their own life, and the lives of their families, were offered. Vicarious suffering I see on every hand. It exists in every country, and has been known in every period of the history of man. You are therefore neither alone in your trials, nor more hardly dealt with than have been thousands before you.

“I say not this, however, as a vindication of indifference to your burdens; merely to inspire magnanimity until such times as they can be lightened or removed. I do not mean my interest in you to pass away with this bit of counsel. I intend doing what I can to improve things amongst you. God has prospered me, and I intend trying to prosper you. I hope to see the time when there will be works in this neighbourhood that shall furnish remunerative employment for all who may be willing to labour. I grieve on account of your present low wages. But hope! When a few difficulties now in the way shall have been surmounted, and your prejudices against machinery toned down a little, I trust a brighter day will begin to dawn. O that the time were here, when the rich and the poor, the employer and the employed, shall feel as one family, and be as one!”

Mr. Sykes was listened to with different feelings by his sullen auditory. But he was listened to throughout. He received no interruption—at least no malicious interruption. One man cried out lustily, “Abel Morgan for ever!” thus bewildering Mr. Sykes a little, and insinuating that he had been charged by Abel with his speech; which no doubt appeared probable to more than one individual, as it smacked very strongly of things that Abel had been heard to say many a time in his soliloquising moods. At the close of the speech

some mocked, and others said, in their hearts at least, what had been said a long time before in reference to a doctrine deemed quite as open to debate as the utility of "power-looms," "We will hear thee again of this matter." "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed," for which he was very thankful.

But the discontent continued to prevail; and a second time that summer Mr. Sykes addressed in public meeting the murmuring weavers of M—— and neighbourhood. His attempts, however, to cast out the evil spirit were by no means successful. The cloud on their sky went on to spread, until darkness and despair filled their hearts.

Nothing remarkable happened during that summer to the parties whose fortunes it is our aim more specially to trace. At the old farm-house with the wide garret, things went on much as usual. Simeon continued his old ways so far as the daylight would allow, and his mother her old interest in the banks her children had in certain barks. Luther continued the same in his attachment to the old school-house, with this qualification, that his liking to go was a matter of growth. Certainly his visits were more frequent; and his mother's suspicions and surmises became stronger. Abel's school declined that summer, much to his sorrow; but Mr. Morgan had shown how the respect of the rich might be won on the part of the toiling operative, and Mr. Sykes showed Abel how that respect will sometimes express itself. He was attentive and kind to the poor school-master; so that, although the decadence of the school depressed his mind, it did not in the least impoverish his purse. Robert worked hard that summer, as if endeavouring to qualify himself for some good situation, and commenced a correspondence with advertisers, &c., which so grew during those warm months, that the postmaster whispered it as his opinion that young Morgan must be up to the ears in debt, for the simple reason that he received so many letters, which he, the postman, could make out to be nothing but "dunning letters."

His attempts to raise himself were very far from being either appreciated or let alone by his neighbours. They denounced and despised him for his hermit-habits; declared that he had

nothing of the pluck of a young man about him ; and that he did not deserve to share the better times for which they were agitating, because he would not join and help them. He continued faithful, nevertheless, to his purpose ; and whilst other young men were squandering their precious time in talking idly about some better days that were to come as by miracle, or in scheming to overthrow settled authority and order, he laboured with hand and head, keeping an eye fixed on the prize before him, viz., a more permanent and remunerative employment.

During this summer, other parties became closely connected with the thread of our narrative ; so closely, that we deem it entitled to more than a bare passing allusion.

We beg the reader, therefore, to accompany us to a spot, a little way out of M——, to which we have not yet introduced him. It is a quiet spot, separated from M—— by a few fields, across which there runs a footpath. There is a decent house, a barn, some sheds, a stable, and at one end of these, a small clump of trees, that just drop their leaves in autumn, and put out fresh buds in spring, like any other trees of an ordinary kind.

The room in this house, into which we take the liberty of walking with the reader without any ceremony, is well furnished and spacious. Its general style is indicative of easy, though not of affluent circumstances. A swarthy, hard-featured man, having well-developed whiskers, nose, and eyebrows, and something very free and careless in his manner, is seated at a table, on which are an open ledger, a small wine-bottle, and a couple of glasses. He is not turning over the leaves of the ledger ; but, with an elbow on each arm of his chair, and the forefinger of each hand pressing hard against his chin, is looking at the table. It strikes you, on examining his face, that he knows something of the feeling we denote by the word contempt, and that he is a man of great decision of character. He is habited in a good suit of black clothes, whose general cut reminds you forcibly of the inky vestures of Leechy Luty. In fact, there are but two points of difference between the garments of the two. Luty's are minus the rich gloss of those before us, and those before us are minus the inky

splashes of Lucy's. There is only the difference which we may suppose age will make.

It is a fine Sabbath afternoon in July. It is both hot and still. There is hardly a cloud in the sky or a breath of wind to be felt. It is particularly quiet all about Springhead House. On the footpath, which is pretty well patronised in a general way on fine Sunday afternoons, there is nothing, excepting here and there a labourer's wife, strolling with an infant in her arms, and accompanied by one or more little ones, who now prattle at her side about some of the many thousand marvels nature presents to the minds of children, and now loiter behind to pluck a wild flower, or bound forward in chace of a butterfly. Two reasons may be assigned for this unusual quietness. One is, that a special service is being held at the parish church, which has drawn away most of those at all inclined to attend a place of worship. The other is, that a monster political meeting is being held on the Roughts, where Leechy Luty resides. The man whom we have joined is evidently expecting some one, for he lifts his eyes rather often now to the hands of the clock, and listens as for the sound of footsteps. Behold him rise, stride to one of the windows, stretch out his neck as if trying to see off some corner, and return to his chair, saying as he does so, in a low, firm tone,—

"Ah! thou art coming at last, old sneak! I am glad to see thee, although I would as soon invite a leper across my threshold, were it not that thou art useful to me. Ah me! dirty ends sometimes require dirty instruments, and if we would gain the former, we must condescend to handle the latter. The ferret can hardly be otherwise than loathsome to the ratcatcher, yet he endures its filth and detestable odour, because of the way it has of sending the vermin into daylight. I must do likewise! But whose ends are dirtier than the general run? Not mine, I know."

Our curiosity being by this speech aroused, *we* go to the window, for we have resolved to be quite at home here, and we see a figure that is not altogether strange to us. It is Leechy Luty, who is picking his way with the utmost caution, turning and peeping and peering about, as we have seen

hungry rats do, when returning from their holes to gnaw at filthy refuse, from which they had just been scared in terror. It is clear that he is about to cover where we are, and that he is wishful to do so unobserved.

"Luty! thou art late!" the man with the open ledger observes, as he points his visitor to a chair that he has planted near the table. There is a harshness in the tone of the speaker, and a rapidity, but great correctness, in his enunciation. He addresses poor Luty like one accustomed to command; and Luty sinks into his chair like one accustomed to obey.

"I had begun to think they had made thee chairman of the meeting. Many scoundrels on the Roughts this afternoon?"

He puts this question as he takes a glass and bottle from a sideboard.

"Yes, middling," Luty replies, as he watches askance the operation.

"Ah! more scenes on the scaffold some of these days. Perhaps thou'lt know better what I mean, Lute, if I say more swinging on the gallows? There!" he continues, putting down a glass brimful of something very red, and that smokes a great deal. "Sip that! Don't drink it off at once, lest it set thee on fire. Bread and butter?"

"N-no, sir," Luty replies. "Think not."

"Come! don't say no if thou means yes. See, here is some cut! Go on! I hoped to see thee sooner, Lute. My sister has taken it into her head to go to church this afternoon, so I have been some time alone."

There is a slight pause. But that is not the thing at all, so Mr. Errton pushes from him the ledger, and leaning forward on the table, and appearing quite familiar and confidential, thus resumes:—

"Well, Lute! and how do my grumblers get on? They are pretty talkative, I've a notion, just now."

"Rayther so," Luty observes timidly, stirring round his brandy and water, and nibbling at his bread.

"I suspect they are trying to revenge at present, by making long thrums and thin pieces. Are worsted mops and stockings plentiful in M—— at present?"

Luty blushes, and drawing his feet up under his chair, as if to conceal his ankles for some reason or reasons, replies, with a touch of confusion,—

“Hardly know that, sir.”

“Seen anything not just as it should be about that old Morgan or his son?”

“N-no, think not, sir.”

“Ah! he’s a sly fox that. But I’ll have him, or I’ll employ an ‘inspector’ specially for the job. There’s been a trap laid for him some time, but the vermin won’t venture. He’ll pad round and round a bait, stretching out his neck and snuffing to get the secret from the scent, but no more. He’s too cautious to go honestly at it and try to get it. I don’t like wise workmen, Lute; so take warning. Those folks who know so much are rather apt to count up their master’s gains, and to appear altogether too big to suit me. That son of his is, to my taste, sadly too important and pompous. When I ask him how much weft he has at home, instead of answering in six plain words, he labours to be so correct and dashing, that I shouldn’t be able to understand him if I didn’t happen to be pretty well up in Johnson and Walker. Weak minded boy! he has yet to learn that great words are not wisdom.”

Luty again stirs round his brandy and water, and observes, “Just so, sir,” with a bewilderment in his look, which leads you to think that he would be able to appear to greater advantage, had he a little of Robert Morgan’s acquaintance with words. Mr. Errton, throwing a little reproach into his tone, next addresses Luty.

“Thou must keep a look out, man. I must know more of what is going on. Thou hasn’t brought me much news lately, and yet the present is the time when I ought to know most. Don’t forget that thou art worth nothing to me except in a certain line. Thy weaving of itself wouldn’t earn thee salt. It is only a spoiling of yarn. I could transport thee for the damage thou hast done me in that way. Come, come, thou must look them up. Thou hast surely been in their chambers lately! What hast thou seen? Much waste, I dare say!”

“Not much, please sir.”



"Ah! they're getting cunning. But I'll weigh their work, if counting threads and using the measure won't keep them right. Water is cheap though, and makes weight with a vengeance. There's no being up to 'em but by having all done on one's own premises, like those power-loom men. How do Sharp's men get on? They don't strike yet!"

"They will do soon, sir. They'd have done so before now, hadn't it been for Mr. Sykes. He's been advising them to be quiet, and not try to force masters. He told them that nothing but bad luck had ever come of strikes."

"That Sykes is always interfering. I wish he'd let trade alone, and confine himself to Sunday schools and churches. He appears wonderfully pleased, like most children, with such things. I'll have a word with thee about him presently. In the meantime, let me tell thee, that whenever thou hast a chance, thou must blow away at the sparks that are falling on Sharp's concern. If they can only be got to blaze right out, I know Sharp will get power-looms, and then those fellows will find themselves in queer-street, I've a notion. They'll then be glad to work for *me*, and that too for lower wages than they now get. I shall then be able to carry on. If, however, they don't strike, or labour come more cheaply to me, I must stop, for I am losing every day. And depend upon it, Lute, if I stop, thou'lt starve. Thou'lt be found some morning dead right out on the Roughs; frozen to death; as stiff as leather. So thou seest it will be best for thee to work with me."

Poor Luty again stirs round his brandy-and-water, and as he sips very freely, rolls about his eyes, as if horror-struck at the appalling fate which Mr. Errton suggests will come upon him in case he ceases business.

"Now about Sykes. He's talking a great deal just now, I suppose."

Luty looks steadily at Mr. Errton, with a comical mixture of wonder and curiosity. The latter, a little irritated at being misunderstood, and at being under the necessity of explaining himself, continues.

"I don't mean that he's talking a great deal at this moment, man! But that he finds a great deal to say in a general way

at present. I heard of his flaring away at a meeting the other evening, telling the folks what he had done, and what he meant yet to do. One of my hands told me, that it would perhaps have been very good, could they have understood him. I suppose that when he would let people look at a thing or two, he puts so much of Abel Morgan's paint on, that they cannot see it. An over-done speech will darken its own meaning, Luty, when it happens to have any, just as paint on a window will throw gloom into a room. Dost thou know what this man is at?"

"The old tale of better times."

"Just so. But dost thou know what those better times are to be? I have got it. A large factory, more Sunday schools, and a few reading-shops. I wonder who'll care for those things in M——, or who'll be the better for them except the man who rides to market. Leechy Luty won't care, will he?"

"N-no, sir, never."

"I thought not. And does Luty know that all this is aimed for his friend Hand Errton? That Sykes of the Farmstead doesn't like him, nor does a single hog of the whole herd to which he belongs. Those pious manufacturers would root him out, send him abroad, and Luty would have to go with him, and be thrown by the sailors overboard, like Jonah. I know them!"

Mr. Errton is now quite animated and rapid in his utterance; and, with his face near to Luty's, and anger flashing from his eye and scorn in his tones, goes on.

"I know them! They say he's a mean dog—that he gives nothing—that he's a disgrace to the business—that he reads his ledger on Sundays—that he brings down wages—excites dissatisfaction—takes no interest in what they call the elevation of the working classes. They write him pious letters, and send him tracts put out by some part of that Row in London which scatters seed from its leprous granary, that grows up into the most spongy cant and the most prickly sectarianism! Those pious manufacturers—those great men in schools and colleges, on platforms and at infirmary boards, want, they say, to unite to improve their hands—to create content—to bring about a better observance of the Sabbath—to turn their mills

into chapels and churches—to put a new face on to things! Ho, Luty! let us turn our factories into preaching-rooms, and we shall have the means of torture at hand for such as will not obey! At the bidding of the priest, the old sinner can be thrown into the wheels at once, and his bones crunched up in a crack, as thine will be some day if thou dost not abide by me!”

Mr. Errton is much excited at the close of this sentence, and glares with the strangest fascination at Luty, until the poor man is completely overcome and thoroughly in his power. It appears that Mr. Errton's moment has come. He brings his mouth close to Luty's ear, and hisses for several minutes, putting at the same time a paper into his hand, which the latter seems at first reluctant to take, but upon which his fingers gradually fasten as the hissing goes on. It is some suggestion for which Mr. Errton has adroitly prepared his victim; something which he deemed it imprudent to mention until poor Luty was completely in his power.

Has this interview been sought that those words might be whispered? Have the three glasses of brandy and water been administered to prepare the man, that his blunt feelings might not be shocked by them? That his moral sense, nearly crushed, might not start back in horror from their burden? Has all this wrath been assumed, that the instrument of Hand Errton might be so cowed as not to dare for a moment to hesitate about doing his bidding? It would appear so, for he rises from his chair as if he had nothing more to say, and walks to the window and looks out at the landscape. Not so poor Luty. He sits with his eyes upon the empty glass before him. Cannot he rise? Has he accepted of some heavy responsibility that he finds it difficult to carry? Has he given a promise and acquired a burden of guilt? He might see that he is no longer wanted; yet still he sits, as if stunned by the blow of some suggestion, or paralysed by the magnitude or diabolical character of some work he has consented to do.

“The footpath is clear, Lute. I think thou hadst best beat a retreat.”

Luty prepares to depart, and Mr. Errton strides to the hearth-rug.

"Stay a minute!" he calls out. "How gets that Simeon Sykes on with thee? I wish him success. See! a pretty score in so short a time!"

This has reference to a page in a pocket-book which he holds up, and on which are several sums of money put down under different dates, as lent by Hand Errton to Simeon Sykes.

"I am much obliged to thee for finding me so good a customer. Ten per cent. and first-rate security! An old Jew could want no more."

"Do not be hard or sharp with him, sir. He loses often."

"Don't thee begin to be chicken-hearted, and to whimper over him. Let every one ride his own hobby just to his own liking. If he will dash over a precipice to be famous, let him go. Don't thee be catching at the reins. Many a man, much stronger in his arm and firmer at foot than thou'lt ever be, has been taken over and smashed for his officiousness."

"They'll take it hard when they find out that he's not all right."

"But whom can they blame? Nobody but himself. He came to me, I am sure unsought, to borrow money. When it does come, it will teach his uncle a lesson. May be he'll then have a little charity for such as sometimes go wrong. It's humbling to a proud tree when one of its branches happens to bear poison-berries. Good day, Lute! Hasten away!"

Reader! do not suppose that we are giving you a mere fancy sketch. We are doing no such thing. We write "that we do know, and testify that we have seen." Do not suppose either that we hold up Mr. Errton as a fair specimen of what worsted manufacturers were twenty years ago. We do not do so. We do not hold him up as a specimen of what they were on the average even. He was an exception; not, perhaps, a solitary one, nor without a single successor, it may be. We write no slander; we intend no satire. Mr. Errton became mixed up with our story, therefore we have written of him. We have heard it deplored that greater cordiality has not existed in these districts between masters and servants. Accept as one reason the fact, that there have been here and there

men like Hand Errton. Oh how much such may do in the way of thwarting the aims of those pious and principled employers of labour, who would elevate their workmen; and live in their grateful hearts! Happily, such are neither numerous nor omnipotent, as the sequel of our narrative will show.

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## CHAPTER VII.

ROBERT MORGAN.

THE trap laid for the Morgans was a prominent and commanding position in a strike movement. The bait was the offer of a good sum of money. This position had been urged upon Abel and his son, in the first place by such as were sincere in their expressions of respect for them, and then by one who acted as the base instrument of Mr. Errton. They, however, decidedly objected to the movement made by their fellow-workmen, and peremptorily rejected their overtures. The consequence was, that they were subjected to petty annoyances and slights on the part of their employer and his agent; just as poor dogs have been kicked for their cowardice, when they have deemed it prudent not to risk their life, for the mere pleasure of the spectators, in encounters with baited and maddened bulls. Hence young Morgan, as a matter of course, became more and more unhappy; and, as he had some hope of being able to improve matters by changing the scene of his residence and his occupation, he resolved to quit M——, and make a trial.

Certainly it was a faint hope; a mere gleam, in truth, which flickered with disheartening unsteadiness in a gloomy vista of change, uncertainty, and peril. In fact, to his own fancy, looking at this time at his prospects, and what he proposed to do, was like looking into a long, dark, unexplored, subterranean passage or cave, where a mere point of light, the smallest fissure, was just discernible in the distance, suggesting a long train of unseen dangers to be encountered before it could be reached. Might there not be almost bottomless pitfalls of error and deception in its rugged path! Deep, silent waters of drowning difficulty and fatal entanglement, gliding

athwart its course ! Might there not be doctrines and heresies, false systems and teachers, that like jutting rocks overhead would imperil life ! Or narrow passes that would forbid further progress, and compel to a retreat at once inglorious and dispiriting ! Might not that dark future be haunted by evil companions, who, flitting about in its gloom as their most befitting element, would only bewilder when they did not terrify, and destroy when they proposed to save ! It might be so, yet he was resolved to try. He recollected that it was written in a certain book, which he had been taught to reverence and trust, " Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass ; he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light."

There was one thing, however, to be done before his departure, which he felt, as he thought about it, would be a difficult thing to do ; that was making known his purpose to his father and sister. He had so far kept it to himself. Of his intention to attempt in some way to raise himself, he had given Hilda Sykes very plain intimations ; but more than that he had not done to any one. His scheme he had formed and matured himself. It had dwelt hitherto down in the secret recesses of his heart, where his own thoughts and sympathies had ministered all the care and nursing it had received ; where it had struggled into form and foliage, however, notwithstanding the chilling presence and influence of drooping hopes and blighting surmises, cankering recollections of exploded visions and baffled efforts ; a withering atmosphere of doubt and suspicion, jealousy and dread, in regard to man, created by the treatment he and his father had received.

It was one afternoon in October, but a very short time before the day fixed for his departure, that he resolved to keep his respected parent and sister no longer in ignorance of his intentions respecting the future. It was a dull afternoon, and a thick snow, for the month of October, was on the ground. He had been that day to Mr. Errton's with his work, and had returned much chagrined and depressed. His master had teased and taunted him a great deal. He had asked him if he thought it would be possible to weave a marketable article

of his father's learned fancies; and how soon he (young Morgan) was to receive his M.A., which, in his case, would mean, he supposed, Master of Asses. Robert had evaded and endured those insulting questions as respectfully as he possibly could, but on his way home had burnt with indignation. He saw that his continuing in the employ of Mr. Errton much longer was impracticable. He had no doubt his father would see the same; and might not the arrival of such a crisis be the best time at which to mention his intentions? Certainly it would show the desirableness, if not absolute necessity, of taking the step he contemplated.

Abel Morgan was not much less depressed that afternoon than his son. His school was low; winter was before them; wages at Errton's were still tending downwards; and he felt that he was getting on in life, and less able to battle with its adverse events. True, Mr. Sykes was kind, but he much preferred being able to obtain his livelihood by honest labour, to being maintained by the charity of another. It was consequently with a sad heart, and a by no means cheerful countenance, that he took his usual place at the fireside that day, on the termination of his school duties. His son was present, devoting a leisure hour to Dr. Brown's "Lectures on the Philosophy of the Mind."

Do not be incredulous, reader! We have known more than one hand-loom weaver well acquainted with Brown; more than one who could bring to his pages a power of analysis, great almost as that possessed by the metaphysician himself. We have heard oral criticisms on Locke, blended with the click of the shuttle!

It was not, however, until evening that Robert introduced the matter nearest his heart. Until then he had not had what he considered an opportunity. Then it came, in the shape of a clean-swept hearth and a bright fire; their three selves seated around, with no expectations of being interrupted by visitors; his sister busy with her needle, and his father leaning back in his chair, in a half-listless humour, but with sufficient interest in the events of the day to lead him to ask his son how he had fared at Mr. Errton's.



"It gets worse and worse, father, in that quarter. Neither our work nor ways seem to suit."

The father sighed, and looked thoughtfully at the fire.

"I think," the son continued, turning over rapidly the leaves of his book, as if his fingers were surcharged with nervous excitement; "I think we shall be compelled to seek for work elsewhere."

"From what do you draw such an inference as that?" Abel asked, lifting up his eyes at the same time to his son's face. "Does Errton say he will not keep us on any longer?"

"No, father, not that; but I feel I cannot meet him time after time, and I am sure I should be sorry if you had to do it. He does not relish us, I can see that plainly."

"May be he does not; but I hope my son has more good sense than to throw himself out of work in these critical times, because his master's deportment does not just please him. He will have to travel far before he meets with an employer disposed to make a pet of him."

"I neither hope nor wish to be treated with such partiality by an employer, father. But as you have mentioned travelling, I will take the present opportunity to inform you, that I have resolved to resort to that expedient, in order to get away from Mr. Errton, and to try if it be possible to make something of myself. My intention is to see if I can get into another and a better line of business. I know I ought to have consulted you before forming such a resolution, but I had not the courage to do so."

Lucy heaved a sigh, but offered no remark.

"What do you mean, my lad?" the father asked. "We have both used the word travel in a vague sense I guess, and must therefore enter into some explanation. You are not thinking of starting out with no definite thing before you I hope—just to wander hither and thither like a vagabond in the earth?"

"No, father. I am about, in the first place, to answer an advertisement I have seen for a sort of clerk, or rather to meet, at his request, the gentleman advertising. I think it is the thing for me, and that I can give satisfaction. If that fail, I will try for something else."

There was silence for several minutes. At length Abel observed, in a sort of tone that indicated resignation,—

“Well, try. I had intended having you in the Excise, but there seems no chance. I have been told again and again that they were full up, and that your application would in all probability have to lie for years; and yet you see Grace’s son, of the Fleece Inn, a wild, reckless youth, has received an appointment at once. I don’t understand it. But when do you start out, and where do you go to?”

“I start out next month, and shall have to meet the gentleman at — statutes. He hires his servants there every year.”

“Well, be cautious. I am sorry you go out at such an uncertainty. But I submit, because I see little chance for you if you continue at the loom.”

“I see none, father. And I see that we are despised on account of our poverty, and not reckoned as good as some who, in no respect except one, are our equals. I cannot bear to be looked down upon!”

“Now does my son speak unwisely and show foolish airs. He is guilty, moreover, of the very conduct which, when pursued in regard to himself, excites in his breast so much indignation. He cannot bear to be looked down upon, and yet there are those whom he counts his inferiors in every respect excepting one. Let my son despise no one, and whatever may be the conduct of others towards him, let him not care, if his own conscience and his Bible give him their approbation.”

Abel Morgan at this point passed into a soliloquising mood, descanting upon life in a general way, which prevented his son making those arrangements for his departure that he had intended doing. The latter was much disappointed with the effect of his disclosure. He had expected something approaching to weeping and lamentation on the part of both father and sister. He observed to himself, when retiring for the night, that they had taken it all with a great deal of coolness. It seemed to him to have fallen flat. He feared they felt no concern for him.

Poor lad ! he was much mistaken. Could he have heard gentle female in prayer that night ; have seen her anxious uplifted countenance, and the cold tear upon her cheek ; or caught the tremulous tones of her soft voice, as it faltered beneath its burden of emotion and supplication, he would have learnt that it was far otherwise with his sister, at least. He would have learnt that she was alive to the dangers he was likely to encounter, and not ignorant even of some of the motives by which he was actuated. She invoked for him the help of One who had proclaimed himself the great Shepherd ; and in tender, simple accents, begged that he might be led into green pastures and beside still waters ; that he might be reclaimed by the rod when he strayed, and protected by the staff when in danger. The light of Bethlehem's star was earnestly implored on his behalf, to shine uninterruptedly on his path, to lead him to the post of duty and safety, and to cheer him by its ray. She prayed, too, that he might be taught to curb and rule his emotions and affections ; and in particular that the passion of unreciprocated love might not be allowed to hurry him into any of the follies men were prone to resort to, in the hope of changing its bent, or of breaking its strength. The Hearer of prayer heard that night a confession of weakness from the lips of that suppliant ; a confession that told of an inward struggle to repress affection ; of an unsuccessful effort to discipline the heart, and to confine its yearnings within the narrow circle of home. Was there unrequited love in her heart ? Had she experienced the torture of casting the eye where it meets only with coldness ? Of coveting the presence of one who only mocked her secret passion, basking in the light of other eyes, and dragging after him, in all his wanderings, her anxious thoughts and pining affection ?

It would appear so indeed ; and what transpired the following day, between her brother and herself, placed the matter beyond any doubt. She entered largely into matters, which she had allowed to be dismissed the previous evening without any comment. While discussing them, her usual gentleness waxed into a warmth and energy that she rarely exhibited ; a warmth and energy that presented a striking contrast

to her calm, resigned devotion of the preceding night. But a contrast we have often met with. Gentleness of disposition, placid devoutness, and honest warmth, seem to us quite compatible. The kindest, meekest, most devout Man, who wept as he thought of the follies of his countrymen, and the coming fate of their proud city, could, and did at times, wield the most stern oratory, and pour forth the most withering invectives. In gentle natures there sometimes slumbers much energy, just as in calm atmospheres there is sometimes a great deal of latent thunder. We read of the *wrath* of the *Lamb*!

"The long and short of it is, you go to render yourself deserving of Hilda Sykes. Or to render yourself deserving of her in the judgment of her friends; for, in my judgment, you are deserving of her now. I think I see how the case stands."

"You are right, Lucy, for once," he replied. "Though how you have got at the secret, I cannot imagine."

"I have been suspicious for some time that a concealed fire was burning at your heart."

She thought to herself, the presence of a disease in our own frame renders us quick at apprehending its symptoms in others.

"I think it required no great penetration to see that. But I was grieved when I found that Hilda Sykes had lit it. Brother! if you would be happy, put it out! Smother it with steady hand, even if it scorch! Oh, that I could trample it down! That I could extinguish its every spark! That I could slake it with the effusion of my own bleeding heart! The sacrifice would be as nothing to me. The reason of my solicitude is, a conviction that you will never be allowed to marry Hilda Sykes. Your fire will burn but to consume you. Mrs. Lee would oppose it. Mr. Sykes, of the Farmstead, would do the same, no doubt. Dinah Sykes would rather she was transported—buried—than married to you. Even Luther, your friend, would not encourage it. And as to Hilda herself, I doubt much if she would favour it, even were the way clear. It appears to me that she has treated you with coldness sufficient to have blown out the flame, even had it been stronger than I suspect it to be. I have not a word to say

against Hilda, in a general way. But I do not like to see my brother, whom, of course, I love and esteem, hang about her like a whipped hound, and she, all the while, high and haughty as a queen. I have seen certain ways and tricks when she has been over of late."

"Sister," Robert interposed, with a flushed face, and much energy, "you do Hilda an injustice! She is neither high nor haughty! She cannot do as she would. Reserve is forced upon her. Don't go and call it pride. I know that if she durst, she would come and spend an evening with you, for I believe she would like it above all things."

"Well, that is more than I was prepared to hear, certainly. But only think of your hoping to gain the hand of one not allowed to visit your sister even! I think, Robert, of what you said last night, because there is so much of truth in it. You said we were despised because we were poor. It is the case. I see the Sykes's deem us beneath them. Had they possessed large wealth, or been highly connected, I should have thought nothing of it. But, as it is, I do. I certainly think they ought to look upon father's intelligence and worth, and your steadiness and promise, as, at least, balancing their little property, seeing that some of them have nothing else to boast of. They do not, however. True, Mr. Sykes of the Farmstead, and Luther, come, and are kind; but they just come for the mere pleasure of it. As to connecting themselves in any way with us, why, they would just scout the thing. Now, what I would like you to do, or attempt, if you will leave home and make this venture, is, to save a little money, if it please Providence to prosper you; and, instead of coming home and humbling yourself in abortive attempts to gain the hand of Hilda, take father and me with you to America. I am willing to go. Wishful to go. I want to be away from here. I feel sure there is that coming which I cannot bear to see; which will prostrate—almost finish—me, except God be my help. We might do well there; here I see no chance. Amongst all the weavers there does not seem a case so hopeless as ours. Many of them will be able to adapt themselves to their altered circumstances without much difficulty. We

shall not. Father's tastes and habits and acquirements will render it impossible for him to feel at home in poverty and neglect; at least very difficult for him to do so; much more difficult than it would be did he possess a mind less informed and feelings less refined."

"Sister, I am truly sorry that you have made this discovery. I hoped that I alone, of those under this roof, had such fears and suspicions. I agree with much you say, but I have confidence in Mr. Sykes and Luther."

"How confidence?" his sister asked.

"Why confidence that they mean well, and will not desert us."

"If you go away, brother, I trust you will intimate to Luther that he will be expected to desert the old school-house, at least until your return. You might add that it would only be seemly to do so."

"How so, sister?" Robert replied, with a smile. "I never looked upon Luther's visits as paid to me exclusively, or to father and me conjointly."

"But depend upon it his mother has. At least she insists that they shall be so construed. Robert, can I trust you?"

"I think you may, Lucy."

"Well, then, I have to tell you, that several weeks ago I received a note from Mrs. Lee, stating that she feared her son's frequent visits would put me very much about, as our cottage was small; and that I need be under no apprehensions of offending either her or her brother by giving her son a hint to that effect. She added that he appeared to take great interest in you and father, doubtless because at present your studies and reading were running in the same channel. I replied, assuring her that she need feel no concern whatever in regard to Luther's visits; that we were all glad to see him, that he did not come often enough, and that he became a greater favourite the more we saw of him. Foolish girl! I laid open my heart merely to have it cut and bruised in its tenderest part. I threw away my disguise, drew her aside into my confidence, to behold what? That which must have been loathsome to her sight: a poor, cringing idolater, prostrate in

profoundest homage before her son. The worthless coheir to an inheritance of poverty and contempt—a mere crawler in degradation, lifting her eye presumingly to a place beside one enthroned in respectability, and encircled by a bow of most brilliant promise; whose glory she could only tarnish, and whose admirers she could only turn away, filled with derision and scorn! Mrs. Lee sent me quite a curt reply. She would have me be aware that if I harboured her son and encouraged his visits, in order to my own selfish ends, I was destined to rue my conduct, and that smartly too. She was not going to have her plans in regard to her son frustrated by my flirtations. Am I a flirt, brother? Have I taken the least liberty with Luther Lee? Has he not insisted on paying me attentions? And has he not hedged me round by a regular system of jealous watchfulness lest any one else should get access to me to do so? God is my witness that the insinuations of his mother are most unjust to me!"

Robert sat in profound silence under these appeals. His compressed lips and fixed eyes indicated severe activity of thought, and the struggling birth of some desperate resolution. His sister went on—

"I have so far refrained from mentioning the matter to father, and I think that for some time at least I shall continue that course. I have spoken of it, however, to Luther."

"And what had he to say?" Robert interposed, with great eagerness.

"Why, that his mother was amongst the best of women, but was the most jealous and officious of mothers; that I was to think nothing more about it; and that he would try and cause me less trouble. He seemed full of indignation, but to me appeared to think it the best way not to say much."

And it was much the same with her brother. He said little, but seemed to feel a great deal, and clave with greater devotion to his purpose. During the remainder of that and several days immediately succeeding it, his thoughts ran on in this way:—

"I will, if it be possible, do as you desire, Lucy. Though I doubt very much if father will consent to emigrate. What noble self-denial in that girl! What an example for me to

imitate! She will pierce herself through with sorrow, rather than stand suspected of a mean deed. She will renounce what I know she covets with heart and soul and strength, rather than be thought guilty of obtaining it by artifice. She chooses a throbbing heart, rather than an accusing conscience; chooses to grieve quietly under the eye of Heaven, rather than triumph amidst the wrath and scorn and reproaches of her neighbours. May God help me to go and do likewise!"

It is the early part of November, and about an hour after midnight. During the three weeks that have intervened between this time and the period of the preceding conversation, great gloom has reigned in the old school-house. Now, however, a bright fire illumines its hearth, and a light flits from one room to another of its latticed windows. Some one is astir without any doubt. It is a starlight night and very still, with just sufficient frost to render the ground dry and crisp; a fortunate circumstance for such as at this lonely hour happen to be starting out upon a journey. Is some one under the roof of the old school-house preparing for such a thing? In all probability; for a great deal of packing is in progress. Its doors open, and a young man, carpet-bag and stick in hand, emerges, followed by a weeping female, who, however, halts upon the threshold. He does not linger, but brushing something from his eyes, plunges right into the silence and loneliness of night. After walking pretty briskly for a few minutes, he stops as if some thought had struck him. Ah, it is to look at the stars, for he turns his gaze upwards. He is fond of the science of astronomy, and half-past one in the morning being an hour at which he has not very often been abroad, he is wishful to observe the appearance the heavens then present. He enters M——, beginning, as he does so, to dislike the strange stillness, and to creep along with a touch of apprehension and caution. He comes to the farmhouse with the long, wide garret, and as it stands out before him, so much blacker than the gloom in which it is enveloped, and with such a high, proud, sullen aspect, he cannot but regard it with deep awe. He steps lightly, as if wishful not to awake even an echo. Perhaps it is Sykes's house dog that



he would rather not disturb. If so, he has failed in his point, for there is a slight growl at the kitchen door, followed by something between a hard snuff and a grunt, as if the inquisitive animal was running his nose along the small aperture at the bottom of the door, to assist his ready instinct in ascertaining the cause of the sounds that had fallen upon his quick ear. He thinks of Hilda Sykes, and wonders if the dog dislikes him, as seems the case with the rest of the family, for presuming to love her. Now a grey cat scuds across his path, and now another, and they halt when they have reached the wall on the opposite side, and look eagerly at him, as if rather surprised or indignant at such an intrusion upon their privacy. A few steps further, and something rolls to his feet. He bends over it. He employs his stick. It is a rat and a weasel in fierce conflict. He gives them a poke, in the hope of separating them. But no ! Another cat, as he supposes, appears on the wall. He resolves to leave them to puss, and pass on. She'll make short work of their fight, if they do not do it themselves. But is it a cat, sir ? True, it is in shape like unto one. And may be, it can grin and bite like a cat, and has altogether an appetite as foul and a nature as vicious. But it is no cat, except one formed in human mould may, and does, by the practice of gambling and dissipation, sink to the level of a feline creature. It is a human head that is now imposing upon you, in which are two eyes that watch you narrowly, and a mind that is busy with speculations about you.

A dismal silence broods over M—— ; and, as he passes through, his lightest step sounds like a heavy tread ; whilst an accidental stumble is followed by quite a frightful volley of reverberations. All the dwellings are in darkness excepting two, and their inmates, doubtless, wrapped in sleep. In the two exceptions sickness is abiding. He thinks of the diversity there is in the lot of men, breathes a prayer on behalf of the afflicted, and passes on. He reaches Mrs. Lee's cottage. He halts and looks up. Luther's sleeping-room window is blinded, and all is still and in darkness.

"Luther," he says to himself, "I once thought you the noblest of young men, and was proud in being your companion.

I cannot yet think otherwise; but for a while, farewell! I will not yet reproach you, but a small cloud of suspicion has arisen. May it be wholly and speedily dissipated, like the early dew! We have been one in view, sympathy, and purpose. Pity we should now be driven asunder by such a secondary thing as social position! That the adventitious distinctions of life should be allowed to spring up as a middle wall of partition thrusting us apart! All great souls clasp hands across such barriers, believing them to be transitory and accidental. May we attain to that high stature of mind, that will enable us to perform such a duty, to enjoy such a privilege!"

An old church clock now tolls out the hour of two. As the hoarse, doleful sound strikes his ear, he recommences his journey, and quickens his pace. He goes on and on, until his path brings him into a wide, firm road. It is the highway, much frequented by vehicles and pedestrians, for the obvious reason that it is the main route of communication between two rather distant, but thriving towns. He listens, then puts down his carpet-bag, and, apparently doubtful about something, strides to the other side of the road, observing to himself, because having no one else to whom to address the observation, "He cannot have passed. He said not earlier than half-past two." This observation has reference to a wagon, which he expected to meet at this point.

We ought here to inform the reader, that a large wagon, with a noble team of sleek horses, passed this spot twice a week, in a general way, between two and three o'clock in the morning. It belonged to an extensive manufactory, two miles west of M—, and its chief business was to feed the said manufactory with raw material. It took no manufactured goods away, they being sent in another and altogether different direction. Consequently Nelson was only loaded when on his return journey. Now this circumstance, in conjunction with the presence in a general way of a good deal of wrapping material in the wagon, rendered Nelson's conveyance very attractive and tempting to such pedestrians as might happen to be journeying in the same direction; and as Nelson's terms were very moderate—a mere trifle—it rarely was the case that

some one did not "go down by the night wagon." The open-hearted, honest-spoken wagoner was somewhat proud of the patronage he received; for when he happened to obtain a new customer, he would expatiate on the excellence of his accommodation, and how that he could beat stage-coaches hollow. He often hinted it as his private opinion, that parties sometimes left their beds to travel with him, merely because they could get better lodgings. It was his idea of rest, being jolted to sleep in a wagon. It was a continuation of the cradle principle. And what if some did thus take an advantage! It did the horses no harm, for he seldom saw the traces a-stretch until his return.

Now it had occurred to Robert, that his best way would be to avail himself of this wagon. It would take him within a few miles of where he wished to be by eight o'clock. He should be under the necessity of leaving M—— under cover of night, which was desirable, and he should also be able to obtain a little sleep. He had spoken to Nelson, whom he knew by seeing him pass that way, and arranged the matter. But he fears he has missed him. He walks restlessly about. No! That is like the rumble of a conveyance. Yes, that is Nelson. He can hear the crack of his whip. Now the heavy tramping of the horses, and now even the chinking of the steel in their harness. Something has passed an angle of the road, and his eager eye catches sight of a dark object coming tumbling towards him. As it approaches, it loses its tumbling appearance, and resolves itself into a man, a wagon, and four plump, spirited horses. The man is seated on one of the shafts of the wagon. This is Nelson's favourite seat, notwithstanding that his predecessor met his death from it. He seizes his bag, and calls out,—

"Nelson!"

"Yes," says a voice that sounds very sleepy. "That Morgan?"

"Yes!" Morgan replies.

"Wo-whoy! Get in."

## CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH LUTHER LEE SHOWS THAT HE HAS THE GERMS  
OF A MAN.

ROBERT'S disappearance soon became a topic amongst such as took any interest in the family, or in noting any little incident that occurred in connection with the village. It was amusing to hear the various constructions put upon it. A few of these were recapitulated by Luther Lee in a conversation with his mother, which took place in about a week after the event.

"I think, mother, we are all puzzled what to make of it. There is Aunt Dinah now, and the postman, why, they are both of opinion, I believe, that it is a debt affair. But aunt maintains that he has run away to escape an arrest; the postman, that he has gone away under an arrest. It is curious to observe how the estimates which the two have formed of law, come out in their conjectures about this matter. Aunt Dinah looks upon law as a dull, slow, threatening but never-fulfilling sort of thing, that may be eluded by anybody. Hence, she says, he has got out of its way. The postman, however, regards it as a sharp, prompt, lynx-eyed concern, hardly to be dodged under any circumstances. So he concludes it's got the lad. Doubtless he has been led to estimate it thus, by the difficulty he has met with in his attempts to contrive such a mode of plundering the letter-bags as would not be likely to be detected by it. Ah, I have no doubt he has felt law to be a terrible and omnipresent thing, as he has looked curiously at the seal of some tempting letter! Then there is Uncle Sykes! He thinks it not unlikely that he has received an appointment as exciseman. He forwarded, you are aware, and pressed, Robert's application for such a situation; and he thinks they may now have

admitted it, and been so urgent, to make up for past neglect, as not to give him time to bid us good-bye! He is sorry the application has succeeded, and for some reason that he will not give, he is now wishful to have him back. Then as to you, mother! You thought it not unlikely, just at the first, that he had committed suicide in some sly way."

Mrs. Lee blushed, and assisted herself to sugar. They were at tea. Her son went on:—

"I am glad you have abandoned that theory, mother. Like many others, it hadn't a single leg to stand upon. I wonder, now, what Hilda thinks of this affair! Assuming, which of course I do, that she has heard of it. My word for yours, mother, Hilda will fret!"

"You have stated the opinions of others, Luther, and commented on them, but you have withheld your own. I should like to hear what it is."

"My own opinion is, mother, that it is a puzzler, and that somebody is to blame for it. I have been at the old school-house this week" (Mrs. Lee again helped herself to sugar), "and talked with Mr. Morgan and Lucy about it, but not a ray of light would they give me as to his whereabouts. His motive, they said, in leaving, had been to try if he could do a little better as to this world, than he had done at home."

"I see it all!" Mrs. Lee replied, as if she had just caught a full-length view of something for which she had been anxiously looking. "It is as I have for the last two days suspected. He has gone to some situation, hoping thereby to raise himself in life, and obtain the hand of your cousin Hilda. There now is a secret for you!"

"Which I think ought to have been deemed unnecessary," Luther remarked very promptly and energetically. "Without a better situation just at present, I reckon him a match for my cousin. But that isn't a secret exactly, mother. I had received a hint from one very likely to know, to the effect that Hilda was remotely connected with this disappearance. I think, if of course she cares for him (which I believe is the case), that she ought to have been allowed to accept his offer. He wouldn't have made a fool of the thing. Trust him for that."

"My dear!" Mrs. Lee exclaimed, in a tone indicating astonishment, "I hope you do not mean that young people should be allowed to follow blind love, without any regard to consequences!"

"By no means, mother. I would ever pay becoming respect even to probable consequences, for they turn out to be very important personages sometimes. But when the match is equal, and likely to turn out well, I don't see that there ought to be the least obstacle thrown into the way."

"Nor I either, Luther. But in this case are the parties equal? Do you consider Robert Morgan a match for your cousin Hilda Sykes?"

"Wherein is he not a match, mother?"

"Look at the circumstances of the two! And then, what are Morgan's prospects? What is hand-loom weaving? For I don't reckon yet that he has anything else to look to."

"Hand-loom weaving is nothing, and to some worse than nothing; for if they had not that to hang by, they would make an effort to get at something much better. But you don't suppose, I hope, mother, that Robert Morgan will hold by the loom all his life, even should the present foolish venture end in smoke? To me, such a notion seems just about as absurd as supposing that a healthy child will hold by its go-cart all its days! He is as sure to outgrow his loom as he has done his baby-linen! He is one of those who must on. He has qualities and acquirements that are worth a fortune; that have lifted men from positions little above his to high eminence at court. I look upon myself, mother, as nothing, and less than nothing and vanity, placed beside him."

"If you were to look upon yourself as a foolish talker, Luther, I think you would be nearer a correct estimate of what you are at this moment. It appears to me you have a great deal to be thankful for, and that you ought to be thankful, and not depreciate yourself in this way."

"Well, mother," Luther replied, wheeling his chair away from the tea-table, "I trust I am thankful for both what I am and where I am. But seriously now, about Hilda and Robert. I wish to know a little bit of your mind in regard to them, for

I intend going into this affair in right good earnest. Now don't put me off, but out with it all, for I believe you have been behind the curtain."

"Luther!" Mrs. Lee exclaimed, looking earnestly at her son with a mixture of perplexity and astonishment, "I think you are forgetting yourself! Recollect what is due to your mother."

She thought, but did not say it, This freedom and assurance come of having no father to guide and restrain him. He feels that he is the head of our small establishment, and so, perhaps, unconsciously displays this ease and familiarity.

"Mother! excuse me if I appear a little free. I have a great deal to say to you this evening, which I must—ought—to say; which I am convinced concerns the comfort of both of us; and this conviction you must regard as the secret of, and as an apology for, my frank, earnest manner. And I choose to begin with Hilda and my friend. I wish to know if you think it possible to make the thing up between them, for I want Robert back again. I don't mean, do you think it possible to make a marriage of it at present? That would be absurd. But just to bring the thing to a quiet, honourable engagement?"

"My opinion is, Luther, that it would be objected to by all our family. I tell you again, Robert is without prospects."

"But suppose I drop him, or be the means of his being dropped, into a good situation as book-keeper in a mercantile concern, with a decent salary, and a chance of promotion. Would that make any difference?"

"No doubt. It would with me. But can you do that?"

"If he were here I could. Our head partner said the other day, now that we were extending our business, we could do with one. We have done it amongst ourselves hitherto. I observed that I had a friend who would just be the man for us, who was at present away, in quest, I fancied, of such a situation—Abel Morgan's son. 'What?' he replied, 'the school-master's son?' 'Yes,' I said. 'With all my heart,' he answered. 'I have often thought I should like to take notice of that family, and do something for them, for keeping themselves

so decent, and for encouraging learning as they have done. I am glad you have mentioned it.' The day after, Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead, unprompted by me, inquired of him if he had something of the sort into which he could put a young friend of his, for a time, who had left home to better himself. Uncle intends trying, if Government will give him up. Of course the way is open for him there. But you see he is away, and if he be all on for Hilda, he'll not like to come back except it be made up between them."

"I am glad," Mrs. Lee observed, "that I said what I did to Hilda. Robert, some time ago, proposed that the matter should be kept in abeyance for a year, during which time he would make every attempt in his power to improve his position and prospects. He asked to be allowed to speak to your cousin at the expiration of that period; merely, I suppose, to report progress. She told him it could not be granted. I suggested that she might allow him to write to her; for it occurred to me then as not unlikely that he might stumble on a piece of good fortune, and I thought she would be no worse, at any rate, for being apprised of it. I assured her she would be in no way committed; and it was so settled."

"Poor fellow! he was turned adrift with the understanding, that if he came back laden with rich spoils, you would then consider respectfully his petition; but if without anything, why then he wasn't to be looked at. This circumstance excites a doubt in my mind as to Hilda's affection. Do you know, mother, I have a notion that true love, when elevated, does not bid its object toil, in tears and sweat, up to its own summit! Selfishness does, but not love. That will ever stoop to its chosen associate, and lend a helping hand up the steep ascent; or if the union cannot in that way be consummated, it will come down and dwell with its object in the valley below. But I am taking too much for granted, perhaps, in assuming that Hilda has acted freely in the matter. I suspect opposition at home. Hence I was going to ask, do you think it possible to bring Aunt Dinah over to consent to an engagement? I don't fear Uncle Thomas. He is a mere cipher there."

"I doubt it. But I don't see that they would have much



right to interfere. They have virtually turned her over to me and your Uncles Sykes and Lee."

"Why do you doubt it, mother?"

"Because your Aunt Dinah is the last person in the world to see anything to be desired about the Morgans. Those things about them that so captivate you, are to her just what colours are to a blind man. She does not and cannot see them. She sees nothing but money."

"Well, but if my plan should succeed, Robert will have money. At least he will have income."

"Ah, but that isn't money in her sense of the word. Besides, if he *had* money, I don't think you could get her thoroughly to relish him. However high he might rise in a worldly point of view, he would never stand well with her. Your aunt is one of those who seem to deem it impossible for a poor man to shake off the dust of the dunghill on which he has dwelt. I don't say this to set you against your aunt; merely to prepare you for opposition to your scheme."

"Well, I'll try it on anyhow. I'll look in upon aunt some day, and board the matter, and have it thoroughly discussed. After that I will see Hilda, all being well. The sooner suspense is put an end to, the better. And now, mother, I have a request to submit to you. You must excuse my freedom. I very strongly desire that you and Hilda would call upon Abel and Miss Morgan."

Luther gave to the words "Miss Morgan," the benefit of a bold, firm, distinct enunciation, and then paused for a few seconds, as if to observe their effect upon his mother. There were indications at that moment in Mrs. Lee's countenance of a severe inward struggle; of a strong effort to keep something down that would rise up, something back that would rush forward. Self-possession, however, proved victorious. Her son went on:—

"I think their feelings are a little ruffled at present, and that such a thing would smooth them down."

"I don't see it to be my duty at present, Luther, to do what you desire."

"But you have more than once told me, mother, that it is

the duty of such as inflict wounds to try to heal them. You have hurt the feelings of Miss Morgan, I need not say how; and I wish you just to call, in order that she may see it was not intentional."

Again there were indications of some strong commotion. There was no yielding, however, as to self-possession. It stood like an embankment of granite. Surges of feeling, crested with mingled anger and scorn, dashed against it, but in vain. She did not even utter a word.

"I am sorry to find," her son went on, "that Miss Morgan thinks we reckon ourselves much above them; and that she is disposed, on that account, to be very shy."

Again the embankment was tried. Great pressure was upon it, but it stood. Not a word did she speak, and after a brief pause, her son thus resumed:—

"In short, I believe that, in consequence of one thing and another, the Morgans—at least, the son and daughter—have resolved to quit the country. And I have just further to add, mother, that if they go, I go."

Luther here broke down. The uttering of the last few words seemed to have been a task for which he had gathered up, and in which he had expended, his best energies; for they were no sooner clear of his lips than, like one weakened and exhausted, he succumbed to the power of his emotion, and wept. This was like unto the passing of a fierce storm over the pent-up feelings of his mother. They were agitated to their lowest depths, and rolled onwards against the embankment, a succession of tumbling waves that threatened to bear down all before them. But it stood. It was rooted in prudence and maternal affection. Not for an instant did it quiver as shock followed shock with such fearful violence. She saw at once how the case stood; and believing that any attempt to thwart her son would be an unwise, perhaps perilous, experiment, like a wise mother she resolved upon compliance with his request. After a minute or two's silence, she said,—

"Luther, I will go. I expect Hilda in a day or two, and if she consent I will take her with me. Allow me, however, to put to you a question. It is by no means pleasant in a general

way, for parents and children to discuss such things as attachments, although I don't see that it is at all unseemly. They are of such importance that they ought not to be shunned. More freedom and candour on such subjects would be better for all parties. You have intimated, at considerable cost of feeling, as it appears to me, that should the Morgans go abroad, it is your intention at present to accompany them. Am I, to use plainness of speech, to infer from that, that your heart is already Lucy Morgan's?"

"You are, mother."

"Have you declared love to her?"

"No, mother. I felt it my duty to consult you first. I found it difficult, however, to introduce the subject, and in my desperation hit upon this clumsy mode of doing it. It appears I have succeeded, although much more by accident than skill."

"Have you counted the cost, Luther?" his mother asked, with serious inquisitiveness.

"I must say that I have not dwelt on that aspect of the question. To me it has appeared all gain, clear gain."

"Has it? My son, however, will find that the question has such an aspect as the one I have just indicated. What will his Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead say?"

"I fear nothing from that quarter, mother. It won't cost me a fraction of his money. In fact, I believe that uncle would sooner confer a dowry upon her, to induce me to marry her, than he would deprive me of anything for doing so. He has not said a word to me on the subject, at least not right out; but I can see that he is very fond of both Robert and Lucy."

"So far that is well. But does not my son deem it likely that he will lose many friends by such a step? Will they ask Lucy Morgan to their homes and tables, as they have asked Luther Lee?"

"I shall leave all such matters as those, mother, to them. They don't trouble me in the least. I am most concerned as to yourself. What do *you* say? How will *you* act?"

"My son, I offer no opposition. All I desire is your true welfare. I trust, however, that such a thing as marriage is

far on in the future ; and that you intend waiting for many changes before attempting to realise your hope."

Luther said, " Oh yes, mother !" and felt singularly placid and happy. In less than twenty-four hours another heart shared the repose his own had found, and they nestled together, dreaming for the first time with confidence and composure of approaching bliss. They had lain for weeks on the rack of suspense, held down by the cordage of circumstances they could not control, tortured by cutting words, and beaten by lacerating slights. Hence they could well appreciate the relief they had obtained. In their deliverance, however, they did not forget one still in tribulation. Their thoughts and conversation followed him who had so lately left the old school-house in sorrow, and of whom no tidings had then been heard. At one moment, they pictured him dividing his time between some neat office and some quiet hearth, happy under the sweet influence of hope ; at another, wandering with dejected mind and downcast head, repulses and disappointments the reward of his toil, his feet sore with weary travelling, and his spirit well-nigh broken by cruel hardship. Now they thought it likely that he might soon appear, under the cover of night, poor and penitent as the prodigal, but without his anguish of guilt ; and now they surmised that the post might soon bring intelligence of some piece of singular fortune, to which he had been led by a path that he knew not.

While this was going on at the old school-house, a conversation was being held at Mrs. Lee's ; its subject the same as the one discussed under the cottage roof the preceding evening, with a change as to one of the interlocutors. Instead of Luther, was Mr. Sykes of the Farmstead, whom Mrs. Lee had summoned for the purpose of going over with him the ground which she and her son had traversed the evening before. After the conversation had become somewhat animated, she observed,—

" I know, William, how undesirable it is to attempt to thwart such a young man as Luther. He does not fix his mind on anything without thinking ; and, as is often the case with such characters, when he does fix, he is fixed. But I

tremble as I conjecture what may be the consequences. If he should be shunned by the society he has mixed with—I mean school and business connections, and so on—it would, I fear, be very serious. Of course *he* fancies that he should be able to find plenty of society in Lucy, were such a thing as that to happen. That he will find to be a sheer delusion, as many others have done before him. Trying to live *in* a partner—to find everything there—is foolish, ruinous. Trying to live in *other* things—other society, scenes, engagements—by the help and presence of such partner; regarding such as a sweetener of the elements in life's cup, and not as intended to supplant them, appears to me the right view to be taken of, and the true line of conduct to be pursued in, the married state."

"Martha! pray don't torment yourself after this fashion. I have no fear whatever as to the reception that will be given to Lucy Morgan, should Luther marry her. Her moral worth will secure her a welcome, I am sure, under every roof where your son has visited, and at every table where he has been asked to sit."

"I am not so sure of that, William. I don't see any very high estimate placed on moral worth by society. In a general way it is left to pine in obscurity. Who seeks the acquaintance of a person solely on account of that person's moral worth? What rich man, or learned man, asks a neighbour to his table on that ground? Where does it, with the exception of a few isolated instances, meet with the least notice or reward? If a man happen to have wealth, pedigree, or a wild erratic genius, he is feasted and fawned to without bounds. But if he be distinguished only by intelligence, uprightness, sobriety, the fear of God, and mercy to men, why, then he is nothing. He receives less notice than the comedian, who pleases just for the passing hour. Yea, less even than the buffoon, whose only merit is that of making men laugh when they ought to be grave!"

"Well, at any rate, it *ought* to receive more attention, and ought to be treated with more respect than anything you have named. There is nothing so precious, nothing of such supreme importance, as moral excellence. It is the very palladium of

society. If it wasn't for the little principle and steadiness, fear of God and mercy to man, that is amongst us, the social body would crumble into a heap of ruins. A nation of mere thinkers and pleasure-seekers, of pandering writers and unprincipled statesmen, of corrupt geniuses and dishonest merchants, would not hold together under any circumstances. Devoid of the salt of true goodness, it would putrefy and perish. And then only think with what favour the Divine Being regards it! In all probability he estimates men, not according to their wealth, learning, talent, genius, fame, social position, or influence, but according to their principles and real character. These determine our worth in his sight. Oh, we ought to treat true virtue wherever found with the greatest respect!"

"I grant you all that," Mrs. Lee replied, puncturing with her threaded needle, in a fidgetty manner, a large pin-cushion on the table at her side. "I grant you all that. But look about! Is virtue so much respected? Is it the case here? Is—"

"And then as to the virtue of Lucy," Mr. Sykes immediately resumed, disregarding the questions of his sister, "and I may add, her brother! Why, it is of the first order. Recollect, it is a tried, sterling virtue. Very different in this respect from a great deal that passes for virtue. There are some—many I fear—who are virtuous just because they happen to have been kept from evil. Their virtue is a sort of hot-house thing. It is the result of a peculiarly favourable combination of circumstances. The elements of its growth have been *applied* in abundance to its roots. It has not had to seek them, by ramifying fibres, in the small crevices of a stony soil. No bending winds have blown over it, to disturb its uprightness. Chilling cold and nipping frosts have not been permitted to fall upon it, and try its power of fruitage. It is fair to look upon, is unblemished and stately, because a frame-work and roofing of privilege and advantage, watchfulness and care, precaution and restraint, have hedged it about and covered it in, walling out temptation, and intercepting the evil that lights on the head of the unprotected. Not so is it as respects the virtue of Lucy and her brother. True, they have been well trained

But with that exception, they have grown up virtuous in spite of, rather than by any help from, their circumstances. Their history has been that of the tree that has to seek its own nutriment, and that, too, amongst the cold elements of the dull sod; but which succeeds in thrusting out its branches notwithstanding all, and in covering them with foliage and fruit, spite of storm and tempest, frowning nights and unfriendly days. And that is the sort of virtue for me. If I want a metal that will stand the fire, I naturally prefer that which I am assured has been tried by it. Such a virtue ought to be respected."

"I grant you all that, William. I again repeat it ought to be respected. But is it so?"

"In theory it is, I think. And I hope in real life."

"In theory it is, I admit, but not in practice."

"Very well, then," Mr. Sykes replied, rather doggedly, as if not liking at all the conclusion to which he saw he was drifting; "we are one thing in theory and another in practice, which I consider a decided reproach."

"Precisely so," answered his sister, with the air of one conscious of having obtained a victory. "And as Luther will have to do with men as they are in practice, and not in theory, I say, that I tremble as I think of what may be the consequences of his marrying this friendless, penniless, nameless, young woman. He'll just be shut out from good society. When his friends see it, they'll just wheel round, and he may go where he likes."

"I'll tell you what he can do. He can rise superior to it all. I think Luther is capable of that. He can just show his friends that he can live without their society."

"But I have no idea of living a sort of Robinson Crusoe life in such a country as this. It doesn't suit my taste. Mark, I offer no opposition. I merely tell you my mind. If they are ingenious, they may create sources of amusement and interest, that will render them, to some extent, independent of society. And now, William, a word about Hilda. There is no end to trouble when this match-making begins in a family."

"I've a notion you rather like it, Martha," Mr. Sykes observed.

"Come, let us be serious. You are aware, of course, that Robert Morgan has left home up to the ears in love. Nothing will suit but he must have Hilda. There's a case for you! And a pretty sea of trouble Hilda is likely to find herself in if it goes on!"

Mr. Sykes said nothing, but moved with a little restlessness in his chair, and readjusted the handkerchief he was holding out as a shade between his face and the bright fire.

"Luther, espousing the cause of Robert with more zeal than discretion, has been, I am sorry to say, to see his Aunt Dinah about it, and has received a great deal of abuse."

A careful observer might have seen a slight jerk in the frame of Mr. Sykes as this sentence fell upon his ear. It was but slight, however, and his sister, not perceiving it, didn't stop to indulge in any conjectures about it, but went on.

"She declares that she would sooner bury her daughter than give her in marriage to a Morgan! She says it will make no difference what he becomes. The higher he rises, the stronger her hatred will become."

There was another restless movement in the chair of Mr. Sykes, and another readjusting of the shade.

"She is for taking no active part, however, in the matter. She says we have taken Hilda under our care, and if we are determined to ruin her we must bear the blame. Luther, it appears, has excited her displeasure by his treatment of Simeon. She charged him with slighting her son; and had the impudence to say, that he endeavoured to damage him in your estimation. She has no doubt, however, about his getting on. His 'bank in the balk' never contained more money, and her hopes of him were never brighter. He will get on, she says, even if all his proud relations cut him off. And she'll take care, if Hilda forms any connection with Robert Morgan, that Simeon has her share of their father's small property. Luther says, of course in mere irony, that she is a bright specimen of a mother."

The shade was here withdrawn, and applied to Mr. Sykes's face, which had become very red, notwithstanding that the heat of the fire had been kept partially from it.



"I'll tell you what she is," he replied, after a moment's abstraction. "She is a most disagreeable woman! How that man has got on with her I cannot imagine. And if she were here I would tell her so, and something else too. I would tell her to give that tongue of hers a rather shorter tether. She allows it to make much too free with other people's motives and character."

"Well, what are we to do in this matter?"

"Nothing at present. And I must request both Luther and Robert Morgan to keep such things in abeyance for a little while at least. I expect shortly to be engaged myself, and to engage them, in an undertaking that will require undivided attention. An undertaking that will affect much their future position and prospects; which, if successful, will render it an easy thing for Robert to win the hand of Hilda, and a by no means perilous or indiscreet thing for Luther to marry Lucy Morgan. I long much to see the aspect of this village changed; to see the circumstances of the working people improved; the disaffection in respect to the masters rooted out; an end put to those strike agitations; and an atmosphere of contentment and good-will thrown around the whole. I long much to see whether it be possible for masters and workmen to get on cheerfully and harmoniously together. This is with some a problem, and I think that to *attempt* to solve it, will be doing what should commend itself to man, as no doubt it will to God. It shall be my *mission*."

## CHAPTER IX.

## INTRODUCES MORE CHARACTERS.

It is Monday evening, a little more than three weeks after the departure of young Morgan. December has come in, and brought with it dull, damp, depressing weather. We know of a scene, however, where there is neither damp nor depression strictly speaking, and thither we wish to hie with the reader.

It is the best room in the house known as the Farmstead. It is a comfortable room; not gorgeously furnished, but fitted up in a style that renders it very attractive. Four gentlemen are present. Two are near the fire, one on each side, in easy chairs. One is stretched on a sofa, and another seated at a large table in the centre of the room, on which are long ledgers, papers, pens and ink; glittering glasses and bottles, and abundance of tobacco and pipes. Only one of the party, however, is smoking tobacco. It is one of the two beside the fire. He appears a good-humoured, easy, modest man. We observe that he has a rather full face; but it doesn't occur to us that it arises from an excess of intelligence. We also observe that he has a way, when engaged on his pipe, of throwing the smoke as he puffs it out, into queer, fantastic shapes and figures. Were we to call Luther, and inquire of him respecting this person, he would no doubt speak of him as "our head-partner," and give his name as Mr. Bower.

On the opposite side of the fire is Mr. Sykes, sitting or rather reclining, very much at his ease, but listening attentively to the young gentleman seated at the table. This said gentleman has in his mouth a cigar, in his hand a pencil, and before him some memoranda or minutes. He is ruddy, but not stout, has abundance of hair on his head, a penetrating

eye, speaks rapidly and distinctly, and appears altogether a man of decision and business. The other, stretched on the sofa, bears some resemblance to him, but is much older.

"Well," the young gentleman observes as we join them, "I am satisfied as to site, capital, and connections. Now for labour!"

"We are of opinion," Mr. Sykes replies, "that there will be plenty of that."

"Just so, Mr. Sykes," the young gentleman rejoins. "But what about the quality? I presume you *sometimes* concern yourself about the quality, as well as quantity, of a thing!"

Mr. Sykes puts his hand on his head, and appears to feel as we have felt, when deeply conscious that an opponent had us.

"Shall we be able to obtain trustworthy servants to fill the more responsible situations? I don't like to be under the necessity of alluring hands from a distance by high wages. It comes in too expensive, and often turns out rather troublesome."

Mr. Sykes replies,—

"We shall be able to manage very well so far as the counting-house is concerned. There are three young men in whom I take an interest, two of whom would superintend that department very well; and by way of getting them to throw themselves thoroughly into the business, the other gentlemen, at our last meeting, agreed that I should buy them each a small share in the concern. I am wishful to do so, as I think it would be best for all sides."

"Well, Mr. Sykes," the young gentleman observes, "and who are those friends in whom you take so special an interest? They are fortunate, I am sure."

"One is my nephew, Luther Lee, now with Bower and Bray."

Mr. Bower closes his eyes, as if wishful not to encounter the keen glance which he is sure this allusion will bring upon him from those sparkling orbs at the table.

"I can assure you he—"

"I know Luther," the owner of the orbs interposes. "I have seen him often at B——. Did he take these minutes?"

"Yes."

"Of course we are all satisfied about him. Who or what are the others?"

"Another is a very superior young man, the only son of a schoolmaster up here. Robert Morgan is his name."

"Hem!" goes the young gentleman, thrusting his fingers into his thick hair, and looking hard at his memoranda. "I don't know about him. Is he much like a schoolmaster? I mean, has he that fastidiousness and stiffness in the use of pen and pencil, that so much afflict that class of men? If so, I doubt if he will suit us; for we can't do with one who troubles himself about up-strokes and down-strokes, and writes a letter as if he were painting a sign-board; nor with one who must needs throw every little account into the shape of a 'sum,' and pass it through the regular school-room process. Does he know anything of manufacture?"

"He's a hand-loom weaver, sir, and Bower and Bray are going to take him into the counting-house by way of giving him an insight into things."

"Come, that's better; for he's sure to have some practical knowledge that some of us would do very well with."

"And what's more than that, sir," Mr. Sykes went on, "he's a young man of great principle."

Again the owner of the thick hair passes his fingers through it, and mutters something about that being neither one thing nor another. Mr. Sykes, as if a little startled, resumes:—

"But I hope, Mr. Sparks, you understand that our firm is to be conducted on principle!"

"I do, if by principle you mean system. But if you mean such things as conscience and piety, why, then I don't understand; at least, I don't assent. Trade won't stand such tight lacing at this day. They may do very well on Sundays and in times of sickness, but in the market they will be mere drag-chains. If you load yourselves with such commodities, you won't be able to make much way. Mark, I don't despise them in the abstract. They may be all very good—precious as gold; but then you may so over-freight a vessel, even with gold, as to sink it clean out of sight."

Mr. Sykes puts his hand on his head again, and strokes it

gently, as if he would smooth down some rising irritation. He speaks, his enunciation slightly affected by excitement.

"Unprincipled ways will find out trading firms and houses in the end!"

"They find them often in possession of very large gains, Mr. Sykes. But don't misunderstand me, gentlemen. I don't intend that we shall start off first-class swindlers. I only mean that in my opinion it will be quite as well not to stick this project full of boasts and pretensions of the class alluded to. Be as good as you like individually, but don't try to make a saint of the firm. I fear if you do you will hope to hide in its virtues in the hour of need. I am sure I should be found hoping to draw rather largely upon such a stock of merit. Hence I wish to keep the temptation out of my way; for I believe, in reality, that such a resource would fail me at the last. But I ask pardon, Mr. Sykes, for this digression, and, with your permission, we will proceed."

Mr. Sykes again places his hand softly on his head, and looks this time very seriously at Mr. Bower. That gentleman happens to be puffing out a zigzag line of smoke, which he no doubt intends shall look very much like a serpent of vapour hovering in the air. He is cut short, however, in the tapering process, by his friend's mute appeal, and returning Mr. Sykes's serious look, he leaves the harmless creature, with its somewhat abrupt termination, to dissipate and lose itself unobserved in the general cloud of smoke.

"About this third youth. Who is he?"

"He is another of my nephews, sir. One of the sons of my brother Thomas."

"Remarkable for principle, Mr. Sykes?" This question is pressing upon our friend before he has fairly disposed of the other. He feels it, moreover, to be a most unexpected attack upon a point he is not prepared to defend; a point that he did not in the least imagine would be attacked in this particular way. It quite stuns him; and before he can collect his scattered forces, and bear down upon his rude assailant, the latter has passed the breach and gained his point. He follows up his question with the observation:—

"I have a notion, if his name be Simeon, that he doesn't excel very much in that particular line, and that he will not do very well for us, unless it be to balance the over-principle of this Morgan. You must know, Mr. Sykes, that I am not so weak as to believe that virtues and vices run in names, as some people say they do in the blood. But I think we had better pass this nephew by for the present, and go on to other matters. What is the general disposition of the 'hands' about here? Are they tractable, or given to *strike*? What say you, Mr. Bower?"

Mr. Bower puffs out very leisurely a long column of smoke, which, spreading out as it ascends, looks no doubt to his fancy very much like an inverted pyramid, and observes,—

"Well managed, they make good 'hands.'"

"Ah, indeed! That means, coaxed and petted, they'll just behave themselves. Now, gentlemen, I may as well say it at once, I don't like 'hands' of this sort. I like to command, not to be under the necessity of purchasing behaviour."

"You cannot do that, Mr. Sparks," our friend Sykes observes, "excepting when the labour market happens to be overstocked."

"So, so! You mean that a master cannot issue his orders to a few workpeople, with any hope of their being obeyed, unless there happen to be as many more half-starved creatures clamouring at the gates, ready to take their places in case they should revolt! I see. Now as the labour market here wont be overstocked, when we have given to our pet project its stone frame, and iron sinews, and puffing, boiling heart of fire and steam, we shall have to succumb to the men, and ask them, beg them, with forefinger pointing to our brims, just to be kind enough to behave themselves, and allow us, their employers, to visit our own premises occasionally. That will be grand, won't it? What risings and strikes! By the by, I hear there is a strike on now. How fares it?"

Mr. Sykes speaks:—

"I trust, Mr. Sparks, that when we get fairly to work, we shall soon bring about a thorough reform in this village and neighbourhood, in both the feelings and circumstances of the

people. I am hoping they will be led to see that there is no necessity for either 'unions' or strikes; that the welfare of the workmen is to the interest and honour of the employer; and that they do best for one another when co-operating cheerfully together. I want to see here the fear of God, and peace and goodwill to men."

"This is a new light on the subject, Mr. Sykes. I cannot help feeling now, that our movement smacks a little of a missionary enterprise. Wouldn't it be well to solicit an advance from some Home Missionary Society?"

A voice now speaks whose tones are new to us, and a form rises at the same time from the sofa. It says,—

"I wish, Ben, with all my heart, it were possible to whip your nonsense out of you. I would try. You have been jabbering this last half-hour about nothing at all. Why can't you sign the compact and have done? You are as satisfied about the whole thing as I am, but you like so to work those jaws of yours. If Parliament had passed an act to regulate everlasting talkers, instead of interfering with factories, they would have shown much more wisdom, and would have conferred on society a far greater boon. Suppose I chastise him, Mr. Sykes? I think I have a right as his elder brother."

The majestic tufts of rank hair here nod like little plumes, and we perceive that Benjamin Sparks is laughing heartily. Presently he snatches up a quill, and having tested its nib upon his thumb-nail, and spread out a document lying before him, he runs it carelessly through a blank space occurring between two names. The pen, which passes along with quite a clatter, leaves in its wake a number of very black, wide letters, which we find make up the writer's signature. He contemplates it just for an instant, and then rises, in imitation of his brother James, who is preparing to depart. As he does so, he observes, that now it is done, and assures Mr. Sykes that henceforth he will make it part of his constant business to endeavour to supplant Luther in his, Mr. Sykes's, kind affections. He hopes they will be able to get on together without either duels or defamation,—in fact, with perfect harmony, running side by side like parallel lines. To run, or work thus together, with-

out suffering the calamity of absorption into one another ; to keep on in the same line of duty right abreast, and yet retain their individuality, is his idea of friendship and co-operation in great undertakings. Mr. Sykes thinks he sees something in this idea ; something that in a measure atones for the banter of the young gentleman. Ah, Mr. Sykes ! Don't judge that bantering air uncharitably. It has been assumed out of respect for your feelings. The young gentleman deemed it necessary to check you in your over-zealous identification of religion with the contemplated manufactory, lest it should prove prejudicial to its interests in the market ; and likewise to frustrate your plan in regard to your nephew Simeon. He had made inquiry, as had also his brother, respecting the three young men whom you proposed to put forward. They are satisfied about Luther and Morgan ; not so as to Simeon. Unfavourable answers had been returned to the questions which had had reference to him. It was clear to them that his connection with the projected undertaking would be as a leak in a vessel ; as rotten threads twisted into a cord that should be strong as death ; as a Judas in a band of men who should be one in heart and action, whose secrets should be as carefully stored and guarded as the wealth of a treasure-house, and whose speculations should suffer no betrayal for thrice thirty times the value of the arch-traitor's bribe. But this they were reluctant to tell you, Mr. Sykes, lest it should be as a sword in your bones. They preferred insinuating a suspicion, and passing the matter by, in the hope that you would be led to inquire concerning your nephew, and brought to see the propriety of not renewing your application on his behalf.

This proceeding has had its desired effect. It has set Mr. Sykes a-thinking about Simeon. He has resolved, moreover, to interrogate Luther respecting him the very first opportunity. Such a chance soon comes, for as the trio go out at the front, Luther comes in at the back. He and his uncle are soon in earnest conversation. Mr. Sykes declares that the time has come when he must know all about his nephew Simeon ; and so it is settled that Luther shall track him out, and strip him of the mask of mystery which he wears. Sunday is near, and



if he fail, as he has frequently done of late, to accompany them to their usual place of worship, Luther is to start off, and discover, if possible, where and how he is spending his time.

It was a drizzly morning, that on which the widow's son was to hunt up his cousin, in case that cousin's devotional impulses or sense of propriety should be too weak to impel him to the house of prayer. It was dull enough, and uninviting enough, to keep such within doors as had far higher claims to the character of true worshippers than Simeon had ever put forth. Hence Luther wasn't at all surprised when his cousin failed to meet him and their Uncle Sykes at the usual junction; but he was both surprised and grieved, excited and curious, when assured, in answer to an inquiry, that he had been seen that morning, steering in the direction of the Roughs. Of course Luther was morally bound to turn round and steer for the same point, which he did in the face of quite a squall of doubts and surmises, regrets and apprehensions. His thoughts were at once at Leechy Luty's. Simeon was there without a doubt, for he would not remain out of doors on such a morning, and there was no other hiding-place on the Roughs. He soon gained the old hut, and on marching in found that poor, miserable specimen of generations fast becoming extinct, seated, as he had on a former occasion seen him, in front of a large, glowing peat fire.

Luty was a little agitated when Luther presented himself; as you, reader, would be, were some high personage of whom you stand in fear, and whose motives, in paying you a visit, you would be unable to divine, to walk quietly in some day, and place himself down unceremoniously on your hearth. Luty knew young Mr. Lee after a certain sort. He knew him, that is, as a gentleman whom he had seen and of whom he had heard. But he had no expectation of receiving the honour of a call from him; especially on such a day, and at such an hour of the day. It was all very strange, and ominous of something not by any means pleasant to contemplate. His visitor greeted him with a "good morning;" which he followed up pretty closely with an inquiry as to whether he had any company under the roof. Luty replied that there was company in

the "back place;" but added that he hadn't anything to do with it. He let the said "back place" to a number of men, who brought whom they liked, did what they liked, and came and went when they liked. His reason for doing so was his poverty. He was a poor man, and hotly pressed to look to his own behoof. Luther next asked if the "back place" contained such a person as Simeon Sykes; but he had no need to wait for an answer, as Simeon at that moment emerged from it, and stood in the presence of his cousin. He had caught wind of the arrival, and stepped out to his relative, to prevent, very probably, any further exploration of his retreat.

"Good morning, Sim. You don't reckon this quite orthodox, do you?"

"I haven't reckoned it at all," Sim replied, saucily. "But what's led you to do that which you would be understood as condemning?"

"Oh, I don't know. You see one finds Sunday dull sometimes, and a little life desirable. And I must say you have got it there, lad."

He pointed, as he said so, in the direction of the "back place," whence the sound of mingled and boisterous voices was proceeding.

"It's a sort of life you had better not seek," Simeon replied, his countenance darkened by ill-humour. "If it is me you want, let us away; for I presume that whatever it may be which has urged you hither, demands your return."

"Why this hurry, Sim? These many years I have heard haste called a fool, and I am not quite sure that I have not heard even you so denominate it. I am going to have a little chat with my friend Luty here, if he will allow it; and then I may take a peep at those merry souls in that *sanctum sanctorum*. Nothing like extending one's acquaintance with men and things, Sim!"

The cloud on Simeon's countenance darkened as he comprehended the purpose of his cousin; and bitterly did he curse in his heart his ease and assurance, as he observed him draw an old stool to the fire, and lay himself out as for a lengthened stay.

"And how long have you dwelt in this concern, Luty?" he observed, as soon as he was well seated.

Luty pushed himself back a little, and looked at Simeon. He had soon a considerable stock of bewilderment on hand, which, of course, very much hampered him. He answered with hesitation and embarrassment,—

"Oh, many, many years!"

"Well, now," Luther went on, "to me it appears that this is a very lonely sort of thing, living up here; and a by no means safe thing, when darkness happens to be on the Roughts, and burglars in the vicinity. They are hard, sharp, desperate fellows, those burglars, Luty, in a general way; and have a hand for cruel measures when emergency calls for them! Aren't you afraid of being murdered some wild, wet night? Just bludgeoned in no time, and then burnt to ashes? But may be you are not often alone. May be that 'back place' is seldom without some strong body-guard. I see. You let it, on account of your loneliness, as well as on account of your poverty, don't you? To my mind, this reason is quite as forcible as the other. I don't see why you shouldn't provide against murder as well as starvation."

Luty's countenance brightened up at this view of his conduct. He saw at once that it supplied him with a pretext for letting the "back place," which had not before occurred to him; one out of which he would be able to construct a capital defence, if ever put upon his trial respecting that matter.

"Now, Mr. Luty," Luther continued, "I suppose Sim there is one of this body-guard. Can you tell me how often he comes, and how long he stays?"

This question very much augmented Luty's already rather large stock of bewilderment, and at the same time brought a most ominous blackness into the cloud on Simeon's face. There was every likelihood that it would soon burst in a terrific thunderstorm. Luther, however, was steady, and firm to his purpose. He had resolved to go right into the thing at once in his cousin's presence, and to rattle along, assuming that his suspicions were well-founded, without giving them time to quibble about each item separately.

"Well, I suppose he's not often away before midnight. Now about another matter, Mr. Luty. I am beginning to think that those men will hardly come here, and sit hour after hour, without doing something. Can you enlighten me on that point? Or can you, Sim? How do they spend their time? Strikes are rather common just now. I hope, Mr. Luty, they are not hatched in your 'back place'? Poaching is not altogether unknown in these parts. Now I trust you are quite sure that those men don't make snares and nets under your roof. And I do really believe—you must excuse my credulity, Sim—that gambling hasn't gone entirely out of fashion. Are you quite sure, Mr. Luty—can you affirm with a clear conscience—that nothing of the sort goes on here? That your 'back place' isn't a gaming-house? You must pardon my freedom, gentlemen. I am an inquisitive chap; or, at least, I am just now in an inquisitive mood. Nos. 22 and 30 are rather active; what phrenologists call the organs of Individuality and Eventuality. I have been frank, you see, in asking you a few questions, and am hoping that you will display as much frankness in answering them."

Luther might have appeared, to a careless looker on, unobservant of the effects his questions were producing. But he was not so in reality. He watched carefully the face of each; and in the concern that overspread the one, and the strong passion that struggled in the other, he beheld what gave considerable strength to his suspicions.

"Frankness," Simeon observed after a moment's silence, "is sometimes folly, and so yours may prove if you are not cautious."

"Then you are not disposed to return me kind for kind, Sim? Well, if you won't give me answers, I shall be under the necessity of furnishing myself with inferences. I can't do otherwise. And the inferences may be more unfavourable than truthful replies would be. Any how, Mr. Luty, I must just peep in here."

As he said so, he rose, and moved towards the door of the "back place." Instantly a form stood before him, and with menacing attitude commanded him back to his seat.

"What now, Sim? For fighting?"

"At your peril that you look in there!"

"How so, my lad? Surely I may venture to look for a moment at a place where you venture to loiter for hours!"

"I don't care for any of your fine reasoning. You don't pass through that door but over my mangled body. You have seen as much as you shall see here, and I hope you have said as much as you have got to say. I'll limit the range of your peering eyes, if I cannot silence your impertinent tongue."

"I don't think you'll do either. Indeed, I'm sure you won't, for your opposition but stimulates my curiosity. I may just tell you, that if your object be to keep me in ignorance of what goes on in that hole, you are putting yourself to a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Ah! Simeon Sykes!" here Luther folded his arms, drew himself up into an erect attitude, looked hard at his cousin, and throwing mingled majesty and scorn into both his voice and face, thus addressed him:—"Ah! Simeon Sykes! don't I already know what makes me ashamed of you? Couldn't I, by disclosing what I know, by stripping you of your disguise, arouse antipathies that would hiss you out of all good society, and suspicions that would bar for ever your return to it? Couldn't I bring down a very thunderstroke of displeasure upon you, that would lay you low in poverty, neglect, and disgrace? Couldn't I—"

"You dog," Simeon stammered out, emotion well nigh choking his utterance and heaving his frame." What do you know? What have you seen?"

"What do I know? What have I seen?" Luther returned, throwing back his cousin's words with an air of triumphant contempt. "Don't I know that you read the filthiest books, mix with the lowest company, and follow the vilest practices? That you drink and gamble, and allow yourself to be taken by the hand by men who live in the most questionable manner? You! who have been so cared for by an uncle; so faithfully counselled; so liberally helped! Don't I know that time after time, when you have declined my society on leaving the Farmstead, you have bent your steps hither? Haven't I seen you disguise yourself like a highwayman, and heard you signal

villains to your side prepared to commit murder if need be? Haven't I seen you in that tainted hole," pointing to the place whence Simeon had emerged, "with cards in your hands, and a gambler's guilt on your head? And couldn't darkness testify, if endowed with consciousness and speech, that not for a few nights alone, but through whole winters, you have been in the habit of taking advantage of its thick shadows to sneak up hither, and prosecute the work of self-ruin? O Simeon! I"—

Ere the personal pronoun had got clear of his lips, a fire flashed in his eye, and the force of a stunning blow sent him reeling over the stool from which he had just risen. It was from the quivering fist of Simeon. Quickly, however, Luther returned, like a rebounding ball, and almost before the flash of fire had passed away, his cousin and he were struggling together. The former soon found himself prostrate on the floor, and had the additional mortification of seeing Luther spring from him to the door of the interdicted apartment. It was all the work of a moment, and was over before Leechy Luty fully comprehended it. Fortunately, it was not heard in the "back place," there happening to be loud laughter at the time; a circumstance on which Luther afterwards congratulated himself.

As Simeon did not seem disposed to pursue his vanquisher, he paused for a moment on the threshold, to allow his perturbation to subside. Luty looked at him in wild bewilderment; Simeon with satanic hate. The latter saw, however, that his cousin was not to be diverted from his purpose, and so seemed sullenly to make up his mind to let him do as he liked. Nor was he; for after taking breath, and arranging his somewhat disordered dress, he unceremoniously pushed open the door, and presented himself to those inside. He found himself in the presence of a motley assemblage, disposed and employed in a variety of ways. Some were old and some were young; some apparently very poor; others not so poor in appearance at least. Most of them belonged to the operative class. Some wore coats of faded velvet, originally black; others fustian jackets, smooth and greasy. Cloth caps, crushed and soiled,

seemed a favourite head-ornament with the young men ; while thin clogs, toed with tin, appeared by the same class to be generally preferred for the feet. Several of those more advanced in life had hungry looks and ragged garments ; hollow cheeks and sallow complexions ; hard, dry, matted hair, interlaced with woolly fibres ; whilst small threads of a similar material clung to the sides of jagged button-holes, and in some cases depended from thick masses of untrimmed whiskers. These belonged to the class of woolcombers. All, with two exceptions, wore week-day clothes and dirty shirts ; but each was shaven as with scrupulous care, and a few gave proof that they had attended to their morning ablutions with commendable zeal. The exceptions alluded to were two men who did not appear to belong to the operative class. They were respectably clad, had intelligent faces, and seemed men of education and manners.

The motley assemblage was variously disposed and engaged. Some lay listlessly stretched on a rude bed that occupied one corner of the room, and some were grouped around a middle-aged man who was reading a newspaper. A number of young men were clustered about an obscene publication spread out before them, seeking for something to provoke laughter in its "random readings," and vile scences with which to feed passion in its illustrations ; whilst another knot of the same class were in earnest conversation, exchanging accounts of the exploits and adventures of the preceding night. The two men who seemed to belong to a higher grade, were discussing, with a few others, some political question, on which they spoke with all the authority of oracles. The reader must not regard this as a mere fancy sketch. It is not so. Would that it were ! To Luther, some of the men were well known ; perhaps to their chagrin. They were in the employ of Bower and Bray.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Luther observed, casting, as he did so, a penetrating eye over the apartment. "I hope I do not intrude ?"

No one answered, but several averted their faces, as if to avoid recognition.

"I came up in quest of my Cousin Simeon, and hearing you so jovial, I thought, you see, I would just look in."

"And act the part of a spy," some one muttered in a feigned tone. It came from the bed.

"I hope, neighbours, you have no cause for fear, were I disposed to assume such a character!"

"Down with all oppressors," a voice cried from the bed.

"Death to masters and machinery! Sykes and Satan!"

"You deal hard measure, friend, to such as are unfortunate enough to be masters," Luther replied, folding his arms, and leaning his back against the door.

"Not harder by a whit than they deserve, I know."

"And you must pardon me," Luther went on, "when I say that I cannot see that Mr. Sykes of the Farmstead (for to him I presume you allude), merits being mentioned in the connection in which you have just now mentioned him. I don't see that he is an exact counterpart to Satan, or belongs precisely to the same class. Besides, he is not a master in the sense in which you have just now used the word, but a very respectable farmer, and, moreover, a very charitable gentleman. I happen to know the man, having seen him more than once in my life."

"A curse on his farm and his charity," the voice replied. "Because a man mars more land than he mends, and gives back a thousandth part of what he purloins, he is called great and good at this day. A murrain be on the cattle, and canker on the corn of all such, say I."

One of the two exceptions here spoke. In a smooth, bland, conciliatory tone, he said,—

"I suppose, young man, this Sykes has lately declared in favour of 'power-looms,' and is exerting himself to get them introduced into the mills about here. This is what rouses the ire of our friend."

"You pre-judge Mr. Sykes. But granting that he is in favour of 'power-looms,' I don't see that he deserves to be denounced in that way. He wouldn't necessarily be an enemy to either his country or kind."

"O my young friend!" the exception answered, shaking



his head very much, as if compassionating Luther's want of perception, "a man cannot be the friend of his country and be favourable to machinery. It has been the curse, and will be the utter downfall, of this nation, if not checked. Before there was any machinery, a working man was independent. He could command his own terms. In fact, the master was under him. He was the master, and he could afford to let it be known. He had it in his power to mar any of the speculations, to break any of the contracts, of his employer."

"And did do so," Luther put in by way of reminder. "Perhaps it has never occurred to you that there was much oppression on the part of the employed in those days, and that that very tyranny has hastened the introduction of the machinery you so much dislike. I am not disposed to argue this point with you; but I would just say, that it appears to me you are altogether out of your province, and standing in your own light, in seeking to coerce your employers, and trying, by violence, to check the increase of machinery. When the 'hands' of an employer annoy and 'strike him,' what does he naturally try to find out? Some means by which he may do without them. He may not like to turn them adrift, but he is hard pressed by competition, and must either do so or give up business altogether. Allow me, neighbours," here Luther looked round upon the company, "to beg you to have a little more charity and consideration for masters, and a little regard to your own interest. Trade may not be that easy thing you are apt to imagine; nor may wages be so much a matter of mere choice as you seem to suppose. Difficulties sometimes exist in connection with the former; an iron necessity not unfrequently rules the latter. Especially let me beg you not to be led away by men who advise you to resort to 'unions' and 'strikes.' By such means you will never better your condition. Employers and employed do best when they feel and work as one."

This appeal at once dissipated the oily manner of Luther's interlocutor, and stirred up fierce anger in him and his companion. He talked wildly of checks upon employers, and injustice to the employed. Affirmed that the English operative would

never be independent until located on the land, his rightful inheritance. Denounced parliaments and priests, taxes and tithes, and concluded by expressing a hope that the men present would not be diverted from their purpose by an impudent spy.

Luther had more than once yearned for an opportunity of speaking out his mind before his neighbours, not merely as respected such characters as the one who counselled and appeared to lead them, but also on some of the very points which were then mooted. He believed that to be a favourable time, so he embraced it. He spoke of the folly of imposing, by violence, any check upon "power-looms;" how that it would only make masters more obstinate, and defeat its own end; how that it was especially impolitic and degrading to meet on a Sunday morning to organise strikes; and how that no millennium to the working man could by such means be brought about.

"You complain," he went on, "of being held down by the laws of the land. How that you cannot rise if you would. I admit that our laws are imperfect, and that some of them may bear less favourably upon you than upon others. But are the laws so much to blame after all? Do you do, in the way of self-elevation, even what the laws allow? Do you strive to rise up to the point at which that embargo presses? You do not. The laws will allow of your being industrious, sober, economical. Yet some of you are not so. Of your putting on clean apparel on the Sabbath, which I know some of you possess. Yet here you are in filth. Of your meeting and mingling with the rich and learned in scenes of worship, and benefiting by the counsel of the good. Yet you assemble here to devise mischief, or pass the time in foolish talk. The laws will allow those young men to get a little learning, and thus qualify themselves for respectable situations. But are they doing so? Do not complain that you have not more privileges so long as you neglect those you possess. It is not opportunity you lack, but disposition. Not the means of elevation, but the will. Not the ladder by which those you envy have attained to their greatness, but the determination to follow them in self-denying toil up the steep ascent. I know of no

greater enemy, in a general way, to the working man, than the working man himself. Who shall tell how often fortune walks at his side, offering to lead him to wealth, learning, fame, whilst he heeds her not, but goes on, deploring his lot as the wicked deed of another, when it is but the just retribution of his own sloth? And as to you, sir, who seem to be a leader and an adviser here, I cannot say less than shame be upon you for deluding men by hopes, which you well know can never be realised. It is with such as you that I connect those disturbances which of late have disgraced so much the worsted districts of Yorkshire. You are the men who incite to disaffection and rebellion! Were it not for you, it would be an easy matter for employers and employed to adjust their differences and keep at peace. You blow the spark into a flame, that you may make money by feeding and directing the devouring element. Never will you get your due, and never shall we have quietness, until you are all banished from the country."

Luther felt that he was rapidly losing his self-control, and that it would be best to beat a hasty retreat on the completion of the last sentence. Appearances convinced him of this. Accordingly he did so. And not too soon either. He had raised a storm, awoke a volcano of fury, that sent forth boiling streams of lava-like denunciation, long after he had gone. Indeed, it appeared highly probable for several minutes after his departure that he would be followed and punished by the wild vengeance he had evoked. Happily, however, he was not.

We are not prepared to endorse all you have said, Luther! Like most special pleaders, you have allowed your over-zeal to betray you into expressions in which it would be difficult, perhaps, to find the property we call Truth. But let that pass. You err on the right side. The working classes do miss much by depending upon "unions," "strikes," and riots, for what can only be obtained by self-improvement. This is the true path to real elevation!

## CHAPTER X.

## A NIGHT WAGONER'S ADVENTURES.

WITH what eager interest we watch our postman, when expecting some fondly-coveted epistle! How we turn away disappointed when he strides past our door! We are almost ready to reproach and blame him. How our heart leaps when his knock smites our ear, and the servant appears with "Letters, sir!" But how galling when, in turning them over, you recognise only familiar "hands," which tell you at once that the letters are on mere matters of business! That they are just old spokes in the revolving wheel of dry routine! That wheel, whose nave is the counting-house; whose fellow, your business connections. And how fidgetty you begin to feel when this trick has been played upon you a few times! And how full of suspicions you grow as to the post-office! There must be some neglect. You think it not unlikely that your expected letter has dropped through some chink in the arrangements of the said post-office, and is lost; or that it has fallen a victim to dishonesty, and been stolen. Perhaps it contained some valuable present, which has tempted an unprincipled clerk to garotte it in some dark corner of the office, or in some thoroughfare on his way home. You begin to think of some deputation to the Postmaster-General, or of a Post-Office Reform Association. Before your cogitations have assumed any definite shape, however, the letter arrives, having come, as you see on glancing at the date, direct from the writer. Your thoughts of post-office reform, with your fidgettiness, pass away, and your confidence in your own postmaster is happily restored.

Luther Lee grew very anxious to hear from his friend, Robert Morgan. He had been told at the old school-house,

that it was the intention of young Morgan to write to him, and give him all particulars. This information had come from Lucy, to whom her brother had sent several letters, and to whom she, in reply, had gladly communicated the change that had occurred in her own circumstances. It was to be a long letter; and Luther had no doubt it would be interesting, however lengthy it might be. He strongly coveted the pleasure of replying to this anticipated epistle. He desired very much to apprise his friend of what was going on, and of what was in contemplation. How that a large manufactory was to be erected in M—, at which all the men and women would be able to find employment—how that he, Robert Morgan, was to be in the counting-house, along with him, Luther Lee—how that his uncle intended to bring back good times to the village, and thus falsify the predictions of those strike agitators—how that he had had a strange adventure on the Roughts, in which he had risked his life, wrestling with his cousin Simeon, and just letting out his mind to the “black squad” that resorted to Leechy Luty’s—how that his uncle had turned the cold shoulder to Sim, thereby stirring up all the depravity of Dinah Sykes’s nature, and making him, Luther, very sad, as he really did not know what was to become of his cousin. To Luther, Simeon appeared like a stone, tending down the mountain’s side. His uncle had hitherto held him as it were, and thus checked his descent. Now that that restraining force was withdrawn, he would tumble down the steep declivity with increasing impetus, and come to the bottom with a fatal crash.

He was also impatient to address a few lines to his young friend respecting Hilda. To him she appeared gloomy and cast down. Sorrow, he doubted not, was in her heart; and that, too, in large measure; for, *tide-like*, it *rose* at times into her face, overflowed at her eyes, clogged her tongue, and submerged some of the most beautiful features of her nature, as the outspread waters will bury for a season the sweet herbage of the flat lowland. This he connected with the absence of his friend. He believed she had a passion for him, though it had not been avowed. He should have the pleasure of the surmise, at any rate.

Well, Morgan's letter arrived one morning, but not before Luther had become well nigh desperate. It was all he could reasonably desire as to length. Its contents were of a mixed character. He was by turns amused, pleased, and grieved. We must give the letter entire, as it supplies some of the links essential to the continuity and completeness of our narrative.

"MY DEAR LUTHER,

"Here I come at last. I hope, though late, I am welcome. Lucy informed me, a week ago, that you were getting quite impatient to hear from me. It is gratifying and flattering to know that I am not yet cast off. She has promised you full particulars, I learn. I say, that is a wee bit o' liberty, as the cannie men ayont the Tweed would say. It is a promise that cannot be easily fulfilled. However, I'll try. I don't know what I wouldn't do to gratify her wishes, and keep unsullied her honour. I believe I'm prepared, were it needful or possible, to write my fingers down into skeletons small as darning needles, to please and serve her. True love leads to consecration. It says, what wilt thou have me to do? It does not require to be plied by motives; simply to be instructed. It does not need entreaties; only guidance. It says, let me know what I am to do, for I am ready to obey. My feet *burn* to run in the way of thy commands.

"I presume that were my sister called upon to explain what she means by full particulars, she would answer, 'some of the more interesting incidents that have befallen him.' I ought, therefore, to begin with my nocturnal journey by the night-wagon, for it certainly was by no means the least interesting thing that I have experienced. I left home, as you are aware, in the night, and came down with Nelson; a strange man, but no dull fellow-passenger when once you get him started. I had capital accommodation, which I highly prized, as I had thoughts at first of trying for a sound sleep. But I soon gave up that idea; for Nelson was so full of talk in his odd, piquant, homely way, that for the first two miles I felt as fresh as noon-day. If you would just conceive of my situation during that

time, you must imagine a still, starlight night; a huge conveyance, rattled by a team of noble horses along a broad, lonely road; a something like a large bundle, wrapped in a rough, grey over-coat and slouched hat, seated on one of the shafts (that was Nelson's favourite seat); and your humble servant in the forepart of the said conveyance, his head inclined forward, the better to hold communication with his coachman and companion. I'll give you a slice of our conversation; for some of his observations were very interesting to me, as showing what sometimes comes in the way of a night-carrier; premising, however, that I don't profess to report him *verbatim*, for you wouldn't be able to understand him were I to do so. Many of his provincialisms I give in words that you of course know.

" 'But there is this drawback, Nelson,' I replied, in answer to an observation of his. 'It must be a dull, and rather melancholy sort of thing being so long on the road in the dead of night.'

" 'Well, about that, there's room for two opinions at least. At first I felt so, but I don't now. I'm not so often alone as you may think. Sometimes I've travellers like yourself; sometimes I drop in with a carter, bound for the kilns, who yokes to and joins me here, when we have rare chat. And even when I don't happen to have any one, I'm not so lonely after all. There is more of incident on the roads than you may be prepared to hear of. When it is moonlight I've fun in watching poachers. Sometimes I see them creeping under fences, or scudding past gateways. At other times I see them loitering on the road, whilst their dogs make the circuit of an adjoining field, to bring the hares to the out-spread net; or standing together, as in consultation, a group of rough, desperate fellows, who wouldn't stick at mauling a keeper into a jelly, if molested. But those keepers abide under cover in a general way, when they wind a gang of poachers. Their keeping is a piece of the primeest gammon I know of, and yet I don't see that it should be aught else. Why shouldn't men be plucked who will preserve? It serves 'em right, and will do, until they keep their game on their own grounds. I've a notion, young man, that you wouldn't much like me to blow up a pig

out of your oatmeal, and then take it home, to have it fizzled for my own stomach. You would require a pair of special spectacles to see the justice of the thing. Rhodes may rave as he likes, but he'll never get Yorkshiremen to swallow the Game Laws.'

"Just then we met a poor rabbit, helter-skelter, chased by a large cat. The timid thing, when it got opposite us, became somehow confused, and turning back, leaped right into the teeth of the fierce beast. It received a shaking for a few seconds, and was then borne off over the wall. The harmless creature struggled a great deal, but I saw its fate was sealed. Nelson had a dash at it with his whip, but missed.

"'There,' I observed, as he resumed his seat, 'Mr. Rhodes will find it difficult to give that poacher an understanding of the Game Laws, and not less difficult to bring him to obey them.'

"'Drat the varmin! I'd have made him understand my laws if I could have reached him. Them things have bred mischief with their ways before now. I've a brother who once got six months' imprisonment for picking up a hare which one of them little tigers had worried, but left behind. The keeper saw him, and vowed he was poaching. Of course he protested, but no! it was so, although the jagged hole out of which the poor thing's life had been sucked, was plain as cannon-shot. He was convicted, sir, and committed; while the same bench let off a young gent, who, in a drunken frolic, had been the death of an old woman. But don't suppose I'm against Game Laws on that account. I'm against them, right dead set against them, on principle.'

"I couldn't help thinking though, that he was against them after all, on his brother's account. How these things do warp our judgments, Luther!

"His tirade against Game Laws, was followed by silence. Shortly we were upon the bridge that crosses the river A——, just before you come to S——.

"'Ah!' he observed, as soon as the horses' shoes struck the rude pavement of the bridge, 'I remember something that



once happened here, which I shall never forget. Crossing, as we are now, and observing a female figure leaning over the raised side-work (parapet), I just put out my head to gratify my curiosity. It wasn't very dark. A pair of wild, black eyes, rolling in a pretty, but sad-looking face, returned my gaze. I felt somehow interested and uneasy, as if something was wrong, it being so unlikely an hour for a female to be out by herself; so I stopped the team, thinking I would ask a question or two, and was just stepping off the shaft, when, happening to look back, I saw a dark object shoot into the air, which, giving a piercing shriek, plunged into the stream below. Oh! how my heart did beat when I heard that splash! I was many a week before I could get it and the shriek out of my ears. I at once called up the miller here, and we made quite a commotion, but she wasn't found until the following day, and then far away down the river. That all came of reducing wages. Hang the rats! they'll do away with pay altogether in a bit. She worked for that Hand Errton, who lives not far from where you joined me; but he began to *pull off* his spinners with such a vengeance, that she was alarmed, and so resolved to try elsewhere. But it was in vain, for he sent after her a loud cry of dishonesty. I suppose he has a way of so hounding his *hands*, when they leave him, that they can't get work. Like the pigeon that left the *hark*, they find no place of rest. The consequence was, that she and her mother were soon in distress; and the same morning that the daughter sought to drown her sorrow, the parent was found dead in bed, with not a crust under the roof. I declared the man ought to be transported, and was strongly disposed to move in that direction. My master, however, soon taught me to weigh better my words. What, he said, if Errton should call upon you to prove that you didn't throw her in? I was soon mute as a mouse, for I saw my zeal might lead me into a snare; so the thing blew over, public pity and indignation passing away as glided on towards the ocean the waters that received the body of the heart-broken child.'

"Ah! Nelson. Many are the social crimes which, for the same reason, receive neither open rebuke nor human retribu-

tion. Men fear the risk of exposing the transgressor, so feign acquiescence in his ways. A selfish timidity is one of the greatest hindrances to justice. More, it emboldens the evil-doer.

“‘It was a sad affair; so sad that I had a *sign* of it the morning it happened. I was giving the horses their feed of corn, when a queer, meaning sort of noise came from the empty *boise* (stall). I was sure it was a sign, and told my wife something was going to happen. She had one the same morning. The door cracked just after I had left, as if switched.’

“I laughed at Nelson, saying I didn’t believe in such things.

“‘But I do,’ he replied; ‘and I believe they come as warnings, and are intended to put us on our guard. They were signs of trouble to our master also; for his pet foal was found dead in the morning in the empty boise. How it got in after I left, I cannot tell. But those fairies can do anything.’

“‘You see that window where a light is shining?’ he resumed after a short pause. We were just rattling through S—. ‘I have watched that window for months. A woman is there going off on’t. I have brought her many a bottle of medicine from the doctor’s, and taken many a message to him. I once lost a fine daughter of decline, and it causes me to notice any one in that way. I am a rough, weather-beaten wagoner, and a stranger, may be, reckons me to have a heart hard and dry as my own horses’ hoofs. But often when I pass that light, so still and lonely, my eye is moistened before I am aware, as I think of what may be going on there. We know what others are passing through, and can feel for them when we have forded the water before them. Presently you will see another. No! it’s not there. All’s darkness. He’s dead at last, I’ll be bound.’

“A white blind, pure and cold as snow, putting one in mind of the sheeted corpse, served to indicate the site of the window Nelson meant. The feeling heart of the hardy wagoner was troubled and he moralised.

“‘Poor man! He’s left six children! All fine, curly-headed creatures. I’ve often given ’em a few nuts and a short ride,

out of pity. Ah! they'll learn a loss. I shall have news when I bait here on my return.'

"This last thought seemed to give him pleasure.

"'Aren't you,' I asked, 'sometimes a little nervous? What with poachers, suicides, and deaths, I think I should be a little so.'

"'Not with those things,' he replied. 'I was once, however, a bit put out, I must admit. It was in this way: one morning about three o'clock in deep winter, as I was jogging on, some six miles ahead of where we are now, I observed the first horse shying a great deal, and inclining more than he was wont to do to the left-hand wall. I couldn't see the side he made from, for the team, being seated where I am now. Presently he took quite a leap, and threw them altogether out of line. I spoke to him softly and took his head. On looking over to discover the cause of the fright, I beheld a high, dark concern, the like of which I had never seen before. I had heard of such, but up to that moment hadn't seen one. It rested on broad, thin wheels, and was yoked to a horse, black enough to grace any *heers*. And what added to my uneasiness was, that it was near to a lonely grave-yard there is on that side of the road. I had my thoughts at once, and didn't like the idea of being so near such business. I drove on pretty briskly after that, until I came to the Trumper's Trough, keeping my own side of the road, I warrant you. As the horses were drinking, what should come up but this same black concern; swift as lightning, and with not the click of a foot to be heard. It shot by with a sort of cold whiff and a whirr, and was gone. I couldn't help thinking it was like a plague or a pestilence, rushing on in fiery haste to some town or city, which it must enter before break of day. I think I've heard our clergyman talk of pestilence walking in darkness. You may be sure I waited anxiously at the Trough, for a carter whom I heard a little way behind, bound for the kilns. And you may be sure the carter was glad to find me there. He soon wanted to know if I had seen the black ghost that had passed. It had made him sweat, he said, like broiled bacon, with its gloved feet and wadded wheels. He told me

that they stuff the horse's hoofs with sponge, and then cover them with strong, leathern gloves; and wrap the rim of the wheels with wadding, which they cover with leather also. It is in this way them concerns manage to get along with such a little noise.'

"Of course my curiosity was astretch. And I think yours would have been, Luther. So I said,—

"'What was it? What was it about? I should very much like you to tell me if you can.'

"'What was it?' he replied, in a tone indicative of supreme contempt for my ignorance. 'Why it was a resurrection-cart to be sure. I thought you had understood that. You've surely heard of such things? Men convey dead bodies in them, from grave-yards to doctors' shops. I wouldn't be the man to drive one, not for the clear gain of a guinea a mile. I baited on my return at the Wagon and Horses, not far from the grave-yard; and after telling the landlord what the carter and I had seen, he whispered me in a secret, that a coffin-plate had that morning been found in the burial-ground, and that the loose earth about one of the newly-made graves bore marks of having been tumbled about a great deal and trampled upon. He said he had no doubt I was right, and that the resurrection-men had been at work. He was reminded then and there, that the man buried in the trampled grave had died of some inward complaint which the doctors couldn't make out, and that he had in a way snapped his fingers at them. The landlord winked at me, and said the chaps weren't going to be done in that way; so they had sent for the body, just to look through it from head to heel, at their own leisure. He reckoned doctors prime taps; adding, that he ought to know, seeing he had had a couple of inquests at the Wagon. He advised me, in case I happened to go off in a way they couldn't spell out, to insist on being buried under my own hearth-stone, and to be sure and put a stout watch into my will, otherwise the vampires would be at me, and would cut me into chops to find out my complaint.'

"I was very near being angry with Nelson on account of his credulity; for I didn't believe, and don't yet, that his 'resur-

rection-cart' was anything more than a *myth*; although, on inquiry, I have found that such things are believed in. I didn't think, however, that the suicide of the poor girl was at all mythical; and as Errton was mixed up with it, I wished very much to return to it. And yet I don't know why, excepting it was to hear him denounce the tyrant. It was a weakness, perhaps, but you see he has persecuted me no little.

"So you throw the blame of the young woman's death on to Hand Errton?"

"Altogether so. He pleaded, I suppose, that he couldn't keep up wages. He's always at that, they say. And yet look here. A gentleman came down with me six months ago, who said that Hand Errton had, the week before, been offering £10,000 for an estate, which a friend of his had to sell. Does that look like losing? Grinding people to the ground, and buying estates!"

"Well," I replied, "men have a right to interest for their capital, profit for their risk, and remuneration for their time, labour, and anxiety. And from those sources a tradesman may get riches. Hence you see it doesn't follow that every wealthy tradesman is a tyrant. But, as you say, Errton is always singing that song. Ever contriving some pretext for a *pull off*."

"Here Nelson interrupted me, to say that he expected shortly to take up two men, who were good customers of his, but who always objected to get in if he happened to have any one. Would I be kind enough to lie down under the sheets and covers for a couple of hours? If I kept quiet they might not find it out, and he should thus be able to accommodate both parties. He didn't expect they would remain with him above two hours, as they always dropped off before daylight. He didn't know who they were, or whence they were; nor could he see, so long as they were civil and paid him well, that he was bound to trouble his head about such matters. I lost no time in carrying out Nelson's wishes; hence was soon under cover; but not sooner than was desirable; for presently two men, after exchanging a few words with him, bounded into the wagon, and threw themselves down at a short distance from me. They carefully avoided the spot where I was, for Nelson

had given them a caution about some crockery he had. I soon found I was conveniently ensconced for hearing. And I also found out something else,—viz., that their voices were not altogether strange to me. Whom do you suppose they were, Luther? You cannot guess. That Bland and his companion, whom we followed up the Roughts that night. The very two. I consider my meeting with them there quite a happy incident, as it will afford us a clue to their track, should it ever appear desirable to get on to it. And I begin to think it will. I fear they will prove stars of disastrous influence to us. You can judge, for I send you an outline of their conversation:—

“‘Well,’ said one, as soon as they were in, speaking and puffing at the same time; ‘I call that tumbling, and not running down a hill. I reckon I needn’t fear the rickets for one six months to come. How do you find yourself, Bland?’

“‘Oh! pretty middling,’ Bland gruffly replied. ‘I should be all the better for a good *tuck out*, and a small windfall up in the quarter we’ve come from. We’re making poorly out, I’ll tell you that.’

“‘I hope we shall do better, Bland, in a bit. That old Luty is certainly a wary bird, and Sim not all we could desire. But we must try it on a little longer.’

“‘Bah!’ Bland answered, with much apparent disgust. ‘They’re not all worth an old chew. As for Sim, he’s as blundering as a blind horse at a dexterous move. He’s about the gawkiest fellow I know. If you let him see where a piece of good fortune lies hid, he daren’t pick it up for fear of being caught. I’ll try another fold, Blamins; it’s a waste of time clipping shorn sheep.’

“‘Oh! but we must persevere, Bland. Nothing got without perseverance!’

“‘Persevere in what, you noodle? In plotting to trap a silly girl? Don’t pretend to so much zeal in the chace, my lad, before one who knows you’ve an eye just now to other game. It won’t do!’

“‘Is John Bland envious? If so, I can excuse him, for that face is enough to turn a man’s stomach against a whole harem.’

“ ‘Envious!’ John Bland replied, in a tone of contempt as loud and ringing as the near vicinity of the wagoner rendered safe. ‘Envious! No more than I am of your debts and disgrace! I wouldn’t give the parings of my nails for a dozen such. Not I, indeed!’

“ ‘You are welcome to your taste, and much good may it do you. But Hilda Sykes for me!’

“The utterance of this name by those polluted lips set me all a-glow in an instant. I felt as if I should die of suffocation. But I knew there was no help for it; so I lay still. The wretch went on:—

“ ‘I’ve given Sim one of Roscoe’s fives, and that old chain, as I told you some months ago, for an introduction; and I think if we can wind him up tightly, and offer him a bribe, he’ll help in an abduction.’

“ ‘He’ll deserve shooting if he does; that’s my opinion, Blamins, if you care to know. But there’s not much danger, for I’m not sure that I shall allow you to come up here many times more. So how then, old squint?’

“ ‘Oh! but there’s that other business, you know, with the proffer of a clean hundred if done neatly.’

“ ‘Come, prate low,’ Bland observed, ‘or that shambling shanks on the shafts will hear. I’m in no ways confident about that matter. I fear we may be in the hulks before we have hooked the hundred pounds, if we fling our line in that direction. I say, Blamins, to be serious now for a minute, that is a queer sort of business. Bad as I believe the world to be, I couldn’t have given it credit for having enough vileness in its heart to spawn such a scheme as that. And it puzzles me to imagine how the author of it can have been fool enough to commission old Leechy to get it done. It appears he’s very particular about not being found out, as well he may. But I think he’s safe; for Luty has agreed to allow himself to be quietly shot if he divulges the name. It’s an abominable proposal, and one which I should have shrunk from making, bad as I am. It’s worse than murder on the highway. It would keep hundreds out of employment, and perhaps be the death of scores.’

" 'I think it might be easily done, if Sim could be got to throw himself thoroughly into it.'

" 'Of course without him it couldn't be done at all; and with him, not so easily as you imagine. There are many things we should require to know, such as the fastenings of the doors and windows; the hours of the old man, and his servants; also whether stragglers loiter about until late. In fact, it appears to me that the greater part of it is a burglar's business, and doesn't belong to us. Once in, of course we could manage, but the difficulty is to get in.'

" 'The way would be to engage a regular hand, and let him go shares. The reward will divide into good wages even for four. We must think of it.'

" 'I don't know how much they thought of it, Luther, but I thought a great deal. Whilst they were sleeping I was thinking; and oh! dark and painful were my imaginings. Upon what could they be bent? What did they do? What desperate men! How undesirable to be so near such characters! Perhaps they were girdled with belts, stuck full of pistols, and carried daggers sharp and glittering! Perhaps their hands were stained with the blood of many murders, and the cries, it might be, of many broken hearts were then ascending to heaven for vengeance on the heads of those seducers! What if they should resolve to play a trick with Nelson's crockery, and find out that it was endowed with the sense of hearing? Would they not smash it? Wouldn't they attempt to seal their dialogue in secret with its blood? Wouldn't that occur to them as the only safe expedient under the circumstances? And were they not able to do it?

" 'I felt as if the sword's point was already at my breast; the pistol's trigger just snapping at my ear. It was an hour of horrid suspense, in which I had not a thought to spare even for you. Hence, as you may suppose, I wasn't at all sorry when they quitted the wagon, faithful to their promise to respect the driver's wares. It was a glorious deliverance, and I celebrated it by a host of questions to Nelson, as to how often they came that way; what he really thought of them; where he supposed they went to, and so on. He was at first



shy and guarded in his replies. He didn't mean to admit me into his confidence. I was determined to force an entrance, however, by one means or another, and at length succeeded, I hope. By liberal pledges, I induced him to promise to watch them narrowly, and listen to their conversation; and if I should desire it, communicate to me anything of a suspicious character that he might see about them. I apprised him that they had a robbery, or something of the sort, in contemplation. He thought it not unlikely, and said he would be sure and keep a look out. It wasn't the first time that he had been set as a spy upon his passengers. He had overheard many a conversation, and got hold of many a secret, when he appeared to be hard and fast asleep. I left Nelson about eight o'clock, taking with me many of his good wishes, and made direct for the Oatlands.

"I soon fell in with pedestrians of both sexes, bound for the *stattes*; and with quite a procession of rude vehicles, freighted with merry passengers, pressing in the same direction. Young men and maidens; fathers and mothers; farm labourers and blooming dairy-maids; coarse-featured countrymen, accustomed to wield the authority of masters, and mere pleasure-seekers hunting for sights, were there, all toiling on with eager haste to the great mart, where so many, some from choice, some from necessity, sell themselves into bondage. It struck me as a busy scene, and that, I thought, must be a throbbing heart into which this stream of miscellaneous life pours its volume. Some bestowed on your humble servant a word, some merely a look, whilst here and there he encountered one who ventured to be familiar and rude, or prying and inquisitive. To those who thus condescended to honour him by their notice, he appeared to be a puzzle. One thought it likely I might be going to hire a man; another, that I might be in quest of bondage; whilst a third deemed it not improbable that I belonged to a fraternity which, I am glad to say, is not very popular, seeing that it picks a livelihood *out* of other people's pockets. As I neared the outskirts of Oatlands, the throng increased, and I began to feel more lonely. I thought of you and your quiet room; of the old school-house and that deserted chamber; of my father and

sister, how they would be following in sorrow their morning avocations, but buoying themselves up with the hope that I might do well. I looked for familiar faces, but the gathering crowd that bustled on every side did not present me with even one.

"The small town wore a gay attire that morning, and was in quite a fever of excitement. Its shops were full to overflowing, with goods laid out in a way intended to be specially efficacious in attracting notice and alluring customers. Amongst them, white smock-frocks and round grey hats; long whips and horses' harness; flails and milk-pails, spades and shovels, were particularly prominent. These so crowded the entrance to the shops in some cases, as to render it difficult for intending purchasers to squeeze themselves into the interior. Everything told of agriculture; the very flavour of the town smacking strongly of the farm-yard and the field. As the hour appointed for meeting the gentleman whose advertisement I was answering hadn't arrived, and as the hiring in the streets had briskly commenced, I resolved, though faint and weary, to wile away an hour in looking upon a scene so strange to one witnessing it for the first time.

"I don't know, Luther, if you have been at a hiring? If not, a word about the custom may be interesting. It appears that one part of the town is specially appropriated to this business. The females offering themselves for service are arranged, or rather, I believe, range themselves, in rows; and those intending to engage servants walk through the lines thus formed, scanning features and form, professedly to assist them in estimating disposition and strength. When they light upon one whose appearance strikes them at all, a conversation is commenced touching such points as the place where the party seeking service may have last lived, the sort of work to which she may have been accustomed, together with the wages she has had. She then proposes to the hirer a series of questions, after which, should both sides be agreeable, a bargain is made, ratified by what is called a *Godspenny*. The men—young men mostly—don't draw themselves up thus in line, but exercising a little more freedom, walk about amongst the master-

farmers, thus making the matter of hiring somewhat less formal and public.

"I would just observe, in reference to this system of hiring, that it may have its recommendations; but that to me it isn't without its objections, and won't be, so long as men resort to such scenes, prepared to take advantage of this exposed situation of the females. That they *do* take advantage of it, there cannot be a doubt. I witnessed familiarities and jests that brought hot blood into many a cheek, and turned the eyes of many a fair face with shame to the ground. And I have since been told that it is by no means unusual for brawny hands rudely to manipulate the arms and chest of females offering themselves for service; for men of gross and sensual habits, with bull-dog heads, to cast lustful leers down the long row of faces, and then make for such as may happen to possess more than an average of personal charms; that such can invariably obtain high wages, and elicit, sometimes, quite a spirited bid from rival hirers; and that there are not unfrequently mixed up with the whole transaction the coarsest remarks and the most obscene allusions. Nay, I have been assured, that the 'stand' has been to many a young woman the evil ground from which she has been dragged into the shame and misery of prostitution. The seducer, by appearing in the garb of a master, and offering liberal wages and a happy home, has succeeded in getting the female completely into his power, only to be abandoned in disgrace after a week of reckless dissipation. Ah Luther! I'm not sure that we haven't here a touch in kind, though not of course in degree, of the evils of the slave-mart. I blush as I think of the abuses of this custom that prevail in this country!"

The remainder of young Morgan's letter will be found in our next chapter.

## CHAPTER XI.

## MORE PHASES OF STATTES LIFE.

"I **MUST** now proceed to the White Horse, where I beheld another phase of *stattes* life. With trembling step I walked in, not sure by any means that I was doing just the right sort of thing. Mr. Banks hadn't come; but he wouldn't be long. I was to sit down. There was a noisy, brawling, heterogeneous company present, the uproar, ale-fumes, and Babel-tongues of which, quite confused and bewildered me. I can just recollect staggering to one of the corners of the room, and dropping into a small space, surrounded by ragged men, who all seemed to be retching, and belching, and hiccougging, and saying, 'Tak od un sup, lad.' I was new to such a situation, and couldn't help hanging down my head like a convicted thief. What would I have? bawled out one man. 'A pint o' porter!' answered another. 'Two!' a third cried out. 'He'll in course treat oud Job!' Two were before me very quickly, and with them a young woman, who threw me into a state of the greatest embarrassment, by observing, in answer, I suppose, to a question which I had managed to get out as to the price of the two pints of porter:—

" 'Sixpence, dear, and as much more as you like for love.'

" 'Bravo!' the company vociferated. 'Give him a kiss, lass!' With a jaunty, impudent air, she rung the coin on a small stand beside her, and then wheeled round, observing,—

" 'I'll leave that for the poor baby's mother to do, as I guess he hasn't yet been weaned.' This was followed by a loud laugh, which put an end to the lull my clumsy entrance had caused; and the harsh voices, whose mingled dissonance rolled on like a tempest, were soon in full chorus. I ventured to look up. A dark object was before me. It was a man, old

and bent, with hard features and horny hands, matted hair and tattered garments: his tottering frame resting on strong crutches, his ill-clad limbs tied up here and there with bands of dirty hay. He didn't look like a regular organism, but like a malformation. It would hardly have occurred to you that he had *grown* after the common fashion, but rather that he had *sprouted*, as a potatoe will do in a dark, damp cellar; and had been taught to regard the knotty shoots found upon his person as arms and legs.

"'I'm oud Job,' said this queer object, 'the hermit o' *Rumels Moor*. You've heard o' oud Job, bud may be till now, ne'er clapt een on the furfumed patrick.' He meant patriarch. He commenced singing, in a loud key, and with quite a stentor-like voice, his eyes swelling in their sockets as if trying from sheer fright to get away,—

"' O Job! O Job! thou's known fur and near,  
From the bonny hill-side to the city so drear,' &c.

"It was really awful. It was as if he had plundered some donkey of its vocal powers.

"'Sup, Job,' said one of the ragged men, proffering him one of my pints, to which, by-the-bye, he had already helped himself. 'Dash it!' continued the man, 'let's choke it, Job! It's a tearer, isn't it?'

"The question was addressed to me, and had reference to Job's voice, as had also the observation beginning with a dash. Job thanked him as he put down the pint with which he had almost choked himself, and was rolling up his eyes in search of inspiration for another blast (for they were nothing else), when the same speaker cut him short by requesting that he would 'be kind enough to shut up shop a bit,' observing, that they had had sufficient bedlam-music for one while; and begging him to have a care, that his roaring took the wind out of the company's talk. Job complied, but gave me the full benefit of his tongue, and a long account of himself. He was a real hermit, he averred, with which I certainly found it difficult to reconcile his being at the White Horse. He lived in a low hole in the ground, into which a mouse would hardly dare to creep, for

fear of grazing its ears against the roof. And yet he was happy; from which circumstance he inferred that men were made to live in holes! Ah, Luther! to what an extent men's tastes and habitudes, passions and interests, tinge their theories of things! Job's infirmity in philosophising widely afflicts our poor, erring race. I learnt further from Job, that he could not sleep in what we call beds. Of this he seemed to boast. One landlord had allowed him to try, when he was singing for the benefit of the house. But, no go. He had to get up, 'tackle' on his 'duds,' and roll on to the bare, cold, stone floor, before any sleep would come. It wouldn't own him on feathers or flocks, chaff or even packed straw. To such an extent was he a slave to his practice of sleeping on damp leaves and litter! He had another boast. He could sing, in a day, any village within twenty miles. He once sang seventeen streets in seven hours, begged half of them from door to door, and took them all up hill too. He spoke sneeringly of some celebrated street-singing mendicant, who had tried the same feat, but had signally failed, notwithstanding that he had a boy to 'do the doors,' and had taken them all 'down-way.' Then he made his own poetry and music also. That, he bade me observe, was by no means common. Half, if not all the singers we gave to, bought their ballads, and just went through the tunes they had learnt, as a barrel-organ will the tunes put into it. For that sort of thing he had great contempt. Here he struck up,—

“‘O Job! O Job! The robin can sing,  
But not from his throat such music can bring,  
As thou on the moor on a bright summer morn,  
When daylight the night of its darkness has shorn,’ &c.

“He had hardly, however, got into full swing, when he was interrupted by a voice calling out,—

“‘Blast it, Job, do stop! Thou must have a dozen ram's-horns in thee. I never heard such a bull. Pity the Jews hadn't thee when ordered to blow down the walls of Jericho. They'd have tumbled over before thy thunder, like a hare with a bullet in its brains.’

"I looked around for the owner of this strange voice, which adverted so irreverently to matters of Scripture history. Just then there walked fully into view a tall, stout, red-faced man, booted heavily, and carrying in his hand a long whip, with the small end of the lash twisted round one of his thick fingers. He appeared to me to have a nature about as coarse as a bear, and to be as *overbearing* as it was possible to be. To my horror he was addressed as Mr. Banks, and solicited by half-a-score voices at once to sup. I soon learnt from my ragged neighbours that he was a great farmer—that is, had an extensive take of land; and soon observed that many of the farmers present had immense veneration for Mr. Banks. They allowed him, with amazing good humour, to poke fun at them with his whip, in a way that I should have resented very sharply. The landlord was very obsequious, and waited with commendable patience for Mr. Banks's orders. He didn't know what to take; and when the landlord, on being appealed to, recommended best brandy, he was a deuced selfish fellow, who always betrayed his customers into extravagance. The great farmer, however, would have some; and if it didn't prove prime stuff, he would pour it down his host's throat. 'Mr. Banks likes a joke,' the landlord observed, colouring deeply, but at the same time smiling blandly, as if he would cover the crimson signs of pain by the flimsy network of affected good humour. I thought, 'Ay, he'll have his joke, but it seems to me he'll have it at the expense of another's feelings.' I didn't like this in Mr. Banks. I don't like it in any one. To find pleasure in piercing one through with a sarcasm or an annoying remark, and in then watching them twist about in their agony, is in my view a most unlovely feature of disposition. There is wanton cruelty in it, just as much as in the case of the boy who can amuse himself with scanning the quivering frame of the mangled worm or fly held up on the point of a pin. I felt it would be impossible for me to live with, or even to be in the service of, such a man. Hence I repaired with disgust to the room to which he summoned those young men who wished to see him in reference to the advertisement in the paper. I soon found,

however, that there was slight likelihood of my entering his service. In the first place, the applicants for the situation advertised numbered upwards of a score, most of them more eligible, in appearance at least, than your humble servant. Then, in the second place, it came out that Mr. Banks hadn't any situation to dispose of. He told us that he had been grievously disappointed, quite as much as we were likely to be. He had hoped to obtain an agency in connection with a Fire and Cattle Insurance Company; and as the work would have rendered the employment of a clerk necessary, he had advertised for one, not supposing for a moment that he should fail to receive the appointment. He had failed, however, and the thing to be done was to make the best of it. We were to be sure and spend a couple of shillings each, for the benefit of the White Horse, seeing that the landlord had allowed us the use of the room we were in, free of charge. Of course the young men were indignant. One of them declared the whole thing was a dodge to get custom to the house; and added, that the White Horse would turn blue before it got a penny from him.

"How my hopes were crushed! What was to be done? I resolved to give the landlord something, and quit the place. But oh, dear! I had no purse. I searched, in a moment, every pocket upon my premises. Yes, it was away. I felt hot as a red-heater at once. My thoughts turned instantly to the ragged men. They're the thieves without a doubt; but where are they to be found? They left the house just before I quitted my corner. Pursuit will be useless. I turned to the window. I could hardly breathe. It seemed as if a *night-mare* was upon me. Thoughts of you, of Lucy, of father, whirled through my throbbing brain. What will they think of my wild venture when they hear of this? Trapped by an advertisement! Robbed of my purse! 'Poor Lucy,' I said to myself, 'she's in the region of hope, where all is sunshine, little dreaming that the first intelligence of me will drag her down into the pit of despair!'

"A change came over me. I quivered with passion. My mind resembled a dark firmament with a smouldering fire in



its skirts, that only waits a breath of wind to envelop it in flames. Fortunately the wind didn't come, or I might have attempted some foolish thing. Instead of it there came thoughts, which, like a rush of choke-damp, nearly put out the fire. What would Dinah and Hilda Sykes say? The former would laugh in wild triumph, while the latter would wrap herself in her former reserve. Perhaps Bland's friend would be able to obtain a hearing. Perhaps she would marry him. Perhaps—yes, without a doubt, it would be so. I saw it all in a moment. I saw her yield to the entreaties of her mother, and heard her promise to think no more of that beggarly Morgan. I saw her receive, shyly at first, the addresses and advances of Blamins. Then she encouraged them, and lastly, she consented to marry, though not without signs of some secret grief, with which she seemed to struggle. I saw her borne away, used as a toy, and then cast off, the inheritor of desolation and misery. The sight was sickening, and I well nigh reeled before it.

"A thought shot across my mind. An awful thought. It was of escape from the sight of what my fancy had pictured. But not of escape by means of flight. Not of plunging into some wild desert, where the voice of man is rarely heard; or flying to some far-off land, where news of home and M—— would be unable to find me out. But of escape by death. I had no prospects. To rise in life, so as to gain the esteem of those in whose hearts I desired to live, seemed impossible. To be despised, or even let alone by them, was unendurable even in thought. Hence despair pointed to suicide. Through that door was escape. I looked at it calmly, steadily, without fear. What was it? Nothing. A plunge, a moment's struggle, and all would be over. In the womb of the life sacrificed in that struggle there would be strangled a thousand pangs, each severe as death itself. To live was to die by degrees, like mortifying by inches. Better, like the poor girl in Nelson's tragedy, clear, at one leap, the misery that slowly extinguishes the life which it at once robs of every charm.

"Just then a funeral appeared, and with melancholy interest

I watched it glide slowly through the crowd below. The mourners seemed in deep sorrow, and I somehow liked them for it. I felt that we each belonged to the same sect—the sect of the sorrowful; that we should estimate alike the empty mirth, the vain shows, the foolish bustle of the busy town. By a mysterious power I was moved to follow them. I'll visit the graveyard; if possible, the scene of the funeral service. It was a Dissenting chapel. I mixed with the mourners, and was motioned by the sexton to a pew. The chief mourners were a young couple; the corpse, that of a little boy. Their grief was intense. They rocked to and fro. A thin, intelligent-looking man officiated. He read well and spoke well. He did the latter with considerable effect. He gained the ears and opened the hearts of his auditory, by telling them that he was qualified to speak to them on that mournful occasion, as he had recently lost a child, a lovely girl, of a complaint similar to that which had proved fatal in the case of the boy whose body they were about to commit to the grave. Here was a trial which better qualified him to speak than all the learning and languages in the world would have done. At least, so said my heart. With pathos he advised submission. It was a dictate of philosophy and reason, as well as Christianity. The dead could not be brought back by us. They yielded to an irreversible decree—the decree of Heaven. They obeyed an inexorable law, the law of succession. Not to relieve our hearts could infinite wisdom afford to suspend this law. They were to keep in mind the many mitigating features with which Christianity had invested death; and not to forget that grief should be restrained, on account of its being inimical to life. Here he touched upon the preciousness of that charge, and the care with which it should be guarded. Fearful was the crime committed by the suicide's hand, and awful the guilt with which the immortal soul rushed into eternity. Those sentences awoke me as from a dream. How had it happened, that in thinking of suicide, I had kept out of view its future consequences? I was horrified, as one that sees a deep chasm uncovered at his feet. I must have been temporarily blinded. Yes, Luther, and temporarily blinded are all who

commit that rash act. They look at what they hope to escape from; not at what they may go to. I resolved to try to live on a little longer.

"But what was to be done? I had no money, and was both hungry and weary. I couldn't answer the question, notwithstanding that it pressed very hard, particularly when the mourners were leaving the grave-yard. It is clear, I said to myself, that I shall have to convert my books into money. I had a few with me. Speak to the grave-digger, something seemed to say. May be he'll direct you to some book-man who would give you the worth of your books, or hold them in safe and honourable pawn on reasonable terms.

"I thought the suggestion a good one, and so approached him. He was surveying thoughtfully the coffin that had just been resigned to his custody. We nodded to each other in a friendly way, which placed us at once on speaking terms. 'They seem in great trouble,' I observed. He agreed with me, adding, that they might well be so. A finer form he had never seen than the one under that lid. His round face and flaxen hair, fair skin and rolling eyes, tripping feet and merry voice, had won the admiration of all whose path he had crossed. But beauty, like everything else merely human, was short-lived, and sometimes withered by very painful diseases. It had been so in that case. Rugged had been the poor boy's descent into the valley of death. But, I thought to myself, as the kind man went on detailing a few particulars of the child's short life and illness, it is all over, and I envy the deliverance he has found. His flaxen locks rest now on a brow that shall throb no more! His tiny limbs, wrapped in their last folds, shall no more be seized with convulsions! His parched lips have given utterance to the last want; and from his pallid cheek has passed away fever's last flush. He has gained a pillow on which the head never restlessly rolls; a chamber in which pain's piercing shriek, sorrow's mournful wail, are never heard. O little slumberer! cheerfully could I put down life's burden, if commanded to do so, and take my place beside thee in thy narrow bed. Much should I prefer the prospect of lying here in quiet, heedless of the world's vanity, until the great resur-

rection, to the one now before me of wandering on, despondency my companion, disappointment my lot.

"I believe, Luther, I could have given a funeral oration. I didn't give anything, however, excepting a few tears. Those came hot and fast. I couldn't restrain them. They attracted the attention, and excited the curiosity, of the grave-digger. Was I related to the boy? No; but I could not refrain from weeping on thinking about the death of the child. I added, that I was in trouble myself, a circumstance which would no doubt account in part, at least, for my being so easily wrought upon. It was because of that that I had lingered in the graveyard. I wished for a little instruction and advice from him. Having said something to a small troop of boys perched upon the wall, which brought them with indecent haste to his side, where they began noisily to wrangle about the spades and to fill up the grave of the poor child, he folded his arms, and leaning against a headstone, listened with respect to my tale of sorrow. The advertisement trick, he said, was a dodge not unfrequently played at those times; and as to the picking of my pocket, why, that wasn't at all to be wondered at. Sharpers abounded in Oatlands during *stattes* time. He was a poor man, or he would have helped me. It was a pity I hadn't spoken to Mr. Garside, the town missionary, who had officiated at the funeral. He was a kind man, and might have done something for me. Perhaps my best plan would be to go to Webster's, a new and second-hand bookseller. He might be induced to take a book of me. I thanked him, and toward evening sought out the shop.

"Having furbished up my appearance with the view of giving to it an honest and intellectual air, I ventured in. Two gentlemen were conversing with a shopman whom I supposed to be Mr. Webster himself. The face of one of the gentlemen I couldn't see. I mentioned my errand in language as correct and elegant as I could command. He replied saucily that he didn't *buy* books. He sold them. Had I taken the shop for a pawnbroker's? No; but I thought he would be better able to judge of the worth of a book than a pawnbroker. The gentleman whose face I hadn't then seen, turned round. It

was Mr. Garside, the town missionary. My heart leaped. I had a friend in court.

“ ‘Pooh!’ said Webster, turning over the book I had placed in his hand, to ascertain its state as to binding, ‘Dick on the Diffusion of Knowledge! Well, now! to be honest just for once, where did you steal this?’

“ ‘It has not been stolen, sir, I am proud to say. I bought it with my own hard-earned money, and I wouldn’t have offered it for sale hadn’t I been in great straits.’

Here I mentioned what had befallen me. The town missionary looked eagerly and steadily at me.

“ ‘Now, Mr. Garside,’ Webster observed, ‘dare you venture? I’ve a notion your credulous heart will be sceptical in this case.’

Mr. Garside shook his head, smiled languidly, and said something that excited a laugh. My hopes of help from that quarter at once fell; and as to the excellent funeral discourse, I at once didn’t believe it. That look, smile, remark, at once knocked all truth, heart, and power out of it. How many good things said in the pulpit are at once, by some one act not in harmony with them, reduced to mere inanities! He would give me a shilling for it! I was taken by surprise, really shocked. It wouldn’t see me through one night.

“ ‘Stay,’ said the town missionary, ‘I think that out of all character, Mr. Webster. The young man’s story may be correct after all. Are you fond of this book, young man?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘I am glad to hear it. Dick’s are works from which a young man may get good. Hear what I’ll do! I’ll give you three shillings upon it, with the promise that you shall have it back any time for the same sum.’

“ Oh, how full of power and meaning the discourse became all at once! And how strange it seemed that such an offer could come from one who had smiled that nasty smile, and excited that scornful laugh! Mr. Webster remarked that he would be bitten, that he was too ready, and so on. He had offered a small sum because he didn’t want the book. There would be endless trouble in a few days to the man who might happen to have it, for he expected that the police would be on

the track of the young rascal and his stolen property, by the following day's dawn.

"I took the money and withdrew. When the throng in the street had somewhat abated, and the evening was getting advanced, I looked out for lodgings. I saw 'Lodgings' in the window of a decent-looking dwelling, and resolved to venture in. I was shown into a long room, where a queer mixture of both sexes was congregated. There were present strong, swarthy boatmen and farm-labourers; begrimed mechanics, and some who might have passed muster for merchants' clerks; females very young, and females in the prime of life, some of whom had the appearance of workers in factories, others of living by the needle, whilst a few were without any badge of occupation. They were disposed and employed in a variety of ways when I entered the room. One boatman had two females in his wind-mill arms, who seemed very much pleased with their custody; whilst another who was asleep, had the honour of the attentions of two factory girls, who, with light touch of fingers and hushed snap of scissors, were busy relieving his garments of such things as buttons, braces, and fastenings of every description, that on starting up he might pass at once into a state of nudity, for the general benefit of the company.

"A few of both sexes were playing at cards. Two of the men thus employed I detected casting furtive glances at me again and again. I thought of Bland and Blamins. Could these be the men? Nothing improbable in the supposition. They were just the characters to be attracted to Oatlands at such a time, to repair for the night to such a house, and to betake themselves to such a game. There was only one circumstance that militated against such a probability. I couldn't see that they knew me. And yet, it occurred to me, I may have been pointed out to them about M—— as the would-be aspirant to the hand of Hilda Sykes. On such a supposition their curiosity is accounted for at once. They would naturally regard my appearance in a common lodging-house in Oatlands as a thing to be a little wondered at.

"My heart sank within me when I had taken a survey of the room and company. What was I to do? I wouldn't go to

bed under that roof; that was settled. Should I be let alone? It was doubtful; yes, very doubtful; for two romping, noisy females set eyes upon me and approached, before I had had time to assure myself on that point. They were just placing hands on my shoulders, and I was gathering courage for a bluff, Keep off if you please! when the door opened, and a woman with uplifted finger and solemn mien begged the company to be still, as Mary couldn't bear any noise. In answer to inquiries which were submitted in tones of kindness by several of the females, the woman replied that she was very ill, and deeply anxious about her spiritual state. They had sent for the town missionary to see her, but he was not at home, so they had sent out to borrow a Bible, that they might read to her. I observed that I had one, to which they were welcome. It was the one you gave me, Luther, with marginal readings and references. The woman thanked me, and received it. The two females looked on with mingled curiosity and respect, and went quietly back to their places. The card-players took no notice, not even lifting up their heads.

"Presently I was sent for, the sick person desiring me to go and read to her. This took me aback, as you may well suppose. Oh! how unfit I felt for such a work, after the evil thoughts of that day! But I rose, and followed the woman despatched for me. I was shown into a small room, where lay a young female in what appeared to be the last stage of a mortal disease. An aged woman, her mother, was holding her hands. With large rolling eyes she looked eagerly at me, as I approached the side of her bed. She was frail and young, but beautiful even in her prostration. The cheek a-glow with a sort of hectic flush; the closed mouth and slightly dilated nostrils, caused, apparently, by pain in breathing; the full, black eyebrows, forming the base of a smooth forehead; the raven hair, resting in disorder on the pillow, and flowing down to the uncovered neck; and the extended arms, stretched out to her mother, as if, true to the instinct of childhood, that parent had power to bless and save, formed altogether a bust, figure, sight, or whatever I should call it, that riveted my attention, and instantly prepossessed me in her favour.

"The mother, in a tremulous voice, asked me if I would read the Bible to her daughter. They feared she was going to die, and were afraid she might be lost. She had tried to read, but it was so long since she had touched a Bible that it was strange to her, and she couldn't hit upon the words she wanted. Her daughter had asked for a new one, but she had told her that old and new were both alike; that it could make no difference where or when got up, so betiding that it contained the right words. Here the daughter faltered out, that she wanted the New Testament reading to her. I took up the book. It was lying open about the middle of the first of Chronicles. I at once saw how the case stood. The poor mother had been reading, or trying to read, from the Old Testament. The daughter wanted to hear the words of the New. I read from John and the second of Corinthians. The message of life seemed precious. It was food to the longing soul. I deemed it desirable that a word of advice and encouragement should be addressed to her, and yet I didn't like to venture.

"Fortunately the town missionary arrived at this crisis. It was Mr. Garside. It would have amused you to have seen how he looked at me; and it would have filled you with hope and joy, had you been in my place, to have felt the pressure of his hand, as he took from me the proffered book. He expounded, simply and affectionately, the way of life. The rolling eye of the poor invalid became fixed; her lips moved in prayer; her soul appeared to enter into rest, and there settled down upon the whole scene, 'a great calm.' To my surprise, she spoke, after a short silence, with comparative firmness and energy, attributable, perhaps, to her deep feeling. It was in reference to her mother. Would Mr. Garside follow, with words of faithful warning and remonstrance, a request she had again and again urged upon her mother, and to which she then wished to add all the force possessed by the last words of an obedient and loving child? The poor mother wrung her hands as in agony. The request was, that her parent would give up the lodging-house. So much of that which was evil had somehow crept into it, that she was apprehensive her mother would be ruined if it were continued. She had never liked it, and



had often promised to toil to the utmost limit of her strength at an honest and decent calling, if it might be given up. Mr. Garside commended the solicitude of the young woman; promised to have a little sober talk with her mother upon the subject; and having offered prayer, bade them good night, giving me a hint to follow him.

"You may be sure I was glad to find myself once more in the streets, particularly as I was there at the invitation of Mr. Garside. He wished me to go with him to his 'apartments.' It appeared that something he had found in the book he had taken off my hand, together with my general bearing, and my presence in that sick room that night, had created the fullest confidence in me. He was shy when he met me in Webster's shop, because his willingness to help and befriend had been, a fortnight ago, most grossly abused. We were kindly received by Mrs. Garside. She knew M——, and also Mrs. Lee; and when she saw your name, of whom she had often heard, in the Bible that had been used in the lodging-house, her confidence and kindness were without bounds. We conversed until very late, or rather early, when I retired to a good bed and had a most refreshing sleep.

"By the aid of Mr. Garside's influence I soon obtained a good situation, at which I still continue. I board and so on with them, and I believe we are happy in one another. Tell my sister that I cannot think of returning to M——, until I have fully reimbursed Mr. Garside and my employer.

"I would just state, before concluding, that poor Mary is slowly recovering, and that her mother has ceased taking in lodgers. Mr. Garside has prevailed upon a few Christian friends to promise Mary sufficient needlework to enable her to keep her mother and herself. That is the way to deliver people from the snare of evil. It is better than just finding fault with others because they don't do it, as some of our novel-writers and popular lecturers will do. *Novel-philanthropy!* it's a fine thing is that! Just writing about the woes of people, and caricaturing the attempts of the Church of Christ to relieve them! (Price one shilling each number.)

"Bah! who has ever been any better for its proud vauntings?

When is it found comforting the dying, reclaiming the wandering, helping the unfortunate?

"I was right in my suspicions as to Bland and Blamins. They did frequent the old woman's; and what's more, Blamins had lately been following Mary with some most shameful overtures. With this circumstance Mr. Garside connects her illness. Those are two strange men. I should much like them watched if we could accomplish it.

"But I must conclude. I have written you a long letter, but I have by no means exhausted my fund of incident. must give you the remainder when we meet. I hope your Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead is well, and that that noble project of his will get carried out. Oh! how much I should like to see M—— prosper once more! It cut me to the quick to hear, the other day, a number of hand-loom weavers singing in Oatlands, accompanied by a *bass*. I collected for them, and, I think, pleased them, by expressing a hope that their depressed occupation would soon be as brisk and remunerative as ever. The bass-player declared never, so long as power-looms were tolerated. Your uncle and his friends will find that they have a strong prejudice to conquer. May they succeed!

"I am, my dear Luther,

"Very truly yours,

"ROBERT MORGAN."

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## CHAPTER XII.

## GIVES ONE OF "LUTY'S LEGENDS."

It is New-year's Day evening. The scene to which we would now introduce the reader is the humble home of Abel Morgan. As regards arrangement, appearance, and so on, it is much as it was when we first became acquainted with it. Its walls are still white, and its sanded floor, which time cannot wrinkle, is smooth and clean as ever. The old clock is still repeating its monotonous tale, and the dark table is in precisely the same place. The oak desk, chest, and corner-cupboard, have lost nothing of their ability to carry one's thoughts captive into the far, far past : whilst as regards the rude book-shelves, they are much the same excepting a little more crowding. A bright fire glows in the grate, which, sided by a shining fender and scoured hearthstone, imparts an air of great comfort to the whole scene.

Those white walls enclose but one occupant. That occupant is Abel Morgan. He is in the old chair and corner, absorbed in a large, strongly bound book. Though alone, he doesn't look sad. A cheerful contentment lights up his furrowed brow and faded cheek. Do you ask whence it comes ? From his altered and improved circumstances. He has received back his son, unscathed by the fiery temptations through which he has passed. Not merely unscathed, but with honours. Mr. Garside and his employer proved, and bore high testimony to, his integrity and worth ; and when he left Oatlands to return home, and enter the counting-house of Messrs. Bower and Bray, there was sincere regret on all sides. The future of that son stretches out before Abel, a long, luminous path, margined on either hand with pleasures fresh and green, and overhung with laurels which time's frosts cannot nip, or its winds wither.

His once anxious, pensive daughter, is hopeful and happy. She and her brother have gone to spend the afternoon and evening at a small party, of which Luther and Hilda were expected to form members. Their bright faces still hover about the old man, and the tones of their sweet voices still linger in his ears. He feels rewarded, in a measure, for his patient continuance in well-doing; feels that he is beginning to reap in joy what he had sown in tears.

The new year has brought with it a copious fall of snow. It continues to fall. It is a tenacious sort of snow, sticking to the foot, and clinging to the head and shoulders, of the traveller. This is doubtless the reason why some one scrapes and stamps, and shakes himself a great deal, before pushing open Abel Morgan's door.

"Who can it be?" Abel asks himself, lifting his eyes from the printed page and listening. "They cannot be returning so soon. And it cannot be Mr. Sykes, for he is in London."

The visitor sidles in, and puts an end to Abel's suspense, though not to his curiosity. Before speaking, he wipes his feet carefully on the mat, and gives himself a rub down. He is dressed in clothes of faded black cloth, which are splashed here and there with ink. As he steps fully into view, peeping and peering like one looking for wild beasts in a forest, he observes, in a drawling manner, twisting at the same time his body, as if it cost him labour-pangs to speak,—

"Nah, Abel, it's wild t'neet."

"What! Leechy!" Abel observes with evident surprise, closing his book and putting down the candle. "Well, I'm glad to see you, but I must confess you have chosen an unfavourable evening for doing me this honour. It's some time since you gave me a call, Leechy. I had concluded you were out of love with me."

"Nay, nay, not so, Abel. Hah goa haat vary little onny weer nah, bud hah thowt hah'd call wi' my best wishes as its New-year's Day."

"You have done quite right. I shall be glad of your company for an hour, and shall reckon it a favour if you will take

with me a pot of home-brewed beer and a morsel of spicecake and cheese. It's the best cheer I have."

"Thank ye, Abel," Luty replies.

They now converse on a variety of topics; but topics more or less related to the inhabitants and affairs of M—— and neighbourhood. They keep it up whilst Abel boards the promised repast, and even during the meal it doesn't flag in the least. As the home-brewed beverage operates upon the "old hermit of the Roughs," he becomes more agreeable. He makes less free with the barbarities of the Yorkshire dialect; for he *can* talk without using them so liberally, and looks out less vigilantly for wolves and tigers. And now behold them with chairs drawn near to the fire. On one hob is the beer-pot, replenished for the special use and behoof of Leechy Luty, who is seated near it, with animated countenance and blinking eyes. On the other, Abel Morgan rests the heel of his foot. He is in easy mood, content just to follow the windings of the conversation. Not so the other. He would guide it; turn it on to this and that, that he may see them more distinctly, as the watchman will turn the glaring ray of his dark lantern on to objects that baffle his sagacity, or excite his suspicions. Luty would like the light turning on to certain matters. But how to get it so turned, is a question. Perhaps it will be best to make a dash into family affairs. So he resolves to try his hand at something having reference to young Morgan. He'll compliment Abel. He observes that Robert is a most uncommon young man. The father shuffles in his chair, and admits that his son is a little above the average. Luty asks, "Does he go away again?" To which Abel replies, "No, he is to enter the counting-house of Bower and Bray." Luty now congratulates Abel on his son's good fortune. Hand-loom weaving will never be worth anything again; and he gives it as his opinion that no one can be fairly blamed for throwing down the picking-stick and taking up the pen; for deserting the sitting-tree in favour of a stool before a desk. He wishes he could do it. But he cannot. He expects that he and half the folks in M—— will be starved to death. They are losing their occupation, and will never be able to take up any other. Abel

hopes not. Hasn't Luty heard that a large mill is to be built, which will employ more than the whole population of M——? Luty helps himself to the beer-pot, or rather helps the beer-pot to himself, and imbibes freely. As he replaces the vessel on the hob, he takes in a full breath and smacks his lips. Is it the home-brewed that is so palatable, or the point that has just been mooted by Abel?

"I've heerd," Luty observes, resorting again to some of his broader provincialisms. We believe this was always the case with Luty when he would be thought particularly homely, earnest, confidential. "I've heerd o' that two or three times, Abel. Nah ha mich truth is ther in it really? Do ye think sich a thing as that will get on?"

"I do," the schoolmaster honestly replies. "And I think I'm competent to form a judgment, for I've had many an hour's chat with Mr. Sykes about it. I believe the land has been agreed for, and that all is moving on favourably."

"Well, nah, ha can believe when I've heerd this. Mr. Sykes ia, of course, a forman in't?—the main spoke in the wheel. Ha mich na does he throw in? Eight ur ten thaasund?"

"I cannot answer you there," Abel observes, poking the fire. "A goodly sum, no doubt."

"Hez the land been paid for?"

Here Abel gives sundry signs of impatience, as if he would say, Don't be so close upon me! but replies,—

"Not yet. That, I believe, is to be done in about a fortnight."

"Mr. Sykes hez goan to draw for that, perhaps?"

The schoolmaster will stand this cross-questioning no longer; so replies, with just a touch of impatience,—

"Really, Luty, you ask for particulars I cannot supply. It may be so, or it may not be so. Now that you set me a-thinking about it, however, it does appear likely his visit to London may have reference to that."

Luty again seizes the beer-pot, but pauses to listen, in the act of raising it to his lips. Something is at the door, and Abel and he look at each other. The pot is returned to the hob, without having reached its destination; and he who hoped

to partake largely of its contents, resumes that peeping, peering habit which reminds you of one in fear of some beast of prey dashing out upon him. After a little scraping and wiping of feet, there come from behind the wooden screen, Lucy, Luther, and Robert. Luty appears relieved. The two former bring the soft radiance of tempered joy upon their faces. The latter has something about him of an anxious, pensive air. Whilst Lucy hastens, with light step, to disrobe, the young men, with a sort of highly agreeable surprise, shake hands with Luty, and affirm, with considerable emphasis, that they are glad to see him. He holds down his head, smiles, mutters something, and applies again to the pot. He drinks off its home-brewed, and then observes that he must away. No! protest Robert and Luther, not yet! The latter observes that he will be going shortly, and will be glad of Luty's company. He asks as to how things move on the Roughts; adding, with a laugh, that they moved rather roughly the other Sunday morning. Luty shakes his head, and observes, that young blood is soon up, and young limbs very venturous.

"Soon up!" Luther exclaims. "If you allude to my blood, I can only say that it wasn't up without just cause. I appeal to yourself."

"Simeon certainly was rash."

"Rash! he was a perfect madman. It was for you, and not him, to refuse me admission into that room. By-the-bye, Luty, I must here say that you allow queer company to congregate up there, and that they carry on at a rather strange rate."

Luty evinces fidgettiness, and Abel Morgan interposes.

"I should like nothing more to be said upon that subject here, Luther. It may appear to Leechy that you intentionally challenge him at a disadvantage, in doing so on the hearth of your friend. He may not feel at liberty to defend himself as he would like. Besides, I deem the season unsuitable. Anything savouring of reproach, or calculated to excite ill-feeling and provoke angry words, is particularly unseemly on the first day of the new year. Then it would be an unkind and ungracious return for Leechy's good-wishes and congratulations, were I to allow you to pain his mind here, Altogether I—"

"I've done, I've done, Mr. Morgan," Luther nobly replies, and extends his hand to Luty, who allows it to shake his.

"Then allow me to say," Abel goes on, "that I was thinking a minute ago, of asking a favour of our friend Leechy. It was with a view to your own gratification, as well as my own. You have heard me speak of Luty's legends?"

Luther nods and says, "Often."

"Well, I was about to ask him to be kind enough to give us one. I think it would edify you much more than half-an-hour's wrangling. At least it would please you more. What say you, Leechy?"

Luty hems, folds his arms, shakes his head, and affects all the solemn earnestness of one who has made up his mind to refuse, for weighty and serious reasons. We say *affects*, for we perceive a smile upon his slightly averted face, which convinces us that the request of Abel is by no means disagreeable. That smile waxes into a sort of a giggle, as the young people follow up the request with, "Do, Leechy, now; do, for our sakes. We shall never be out of your debt. That's a good man. It would be a real new-year's gift!"

"Well," he observes, by way of intimating his willingness to comply, "if I do give ye one, it must be short."

The promise of even a short one is esteemed quite a boon, as is rendered evident by a little preparatory bustle, comprising the replenishing of Luty's beer-pot, the snuffing of the candle, the selecting of easy seats and postures, and the clearing of throats and so on, that no humming or coughing may interrupt the delivery of the legend. Abel throws both feet on to the hob. Lucy draws her chair close besides his, leans upon its arm, and places her right hand in the left palm of her parent's. Luther endeavours so to dispose of his frame as that it will cost him no effort to bring his eyes to bear at any moment upon his idol. As he experiments upon her, to ascertain if he has found the right position, focus, and so on, and contemplates her extended foot and round waist, heaving chest and faultless neck, closed lips and rosy cheeks, soft eyes and flowing ringlets, heightened in interest by the little blushing and confusion occasioned by the meeting of their eyes, he thinks himself the



most to be envied of any young man, and cannot help feeling a sort of pity for others, seeing that none possess, nor can be allowed to share, such a treasure. He wonders why he hasn't a host of rivals. As for Robert, he sits apart. With chair tipped back against the table with drooping wings—meet emblems of his own hopes—he has the appearance of one who would rather commune with his own thoughts than with the incidents of the expected legend.

Luty, like all popular performers, craves the indulgence of his audience. He begs to inform the young people that the legends, in regard to which Mr. Morgan has been pleased to express himself so favourably, are nothing more than tales, which he learnt from his father's lips, who had received them from *his* father. He further adds, that they have been kept up in the family mainly to wile away the long evenings of dull winter, and to conserve correct ideas of the state of things in times long gone by. He'll give them "The Lidjon of the Bracken Bank." He intimates that he shall condense, as the evening is getting advanced.

It ought here to be intimated, that *we* shall condense; and also that we are taking a slight liberty with Luty's mode of expressing himself. His "Lidjons," whilst freer from uncouth words and phrases than his general conversation, contained, nevertheless, a number quite sufficient, if given, to render them somewhat unintelligible to the general reader. Hence we shall substitute a word here and there, retaining some of his sentences, however, entire.

"The Lidjon of the Bracken Bank," he observes, "belongs, as indeed do all my lidjons, to a time far, far back in the past, when days were fine and summers long; when foaks and fields were few, and the wide common was the poor man's undisputed heritage; when there was no smoke to cloud the bright sky, nor filth of noisy mills to pollute the pure stream; when fish swarmed in the waters, plump birds winged in flocks through the air, and fleet-footed creatures, suitable for food, scudded about on the heath-covered hills; when the arrow, the hook, and the hoe, were competent to provide support for man's body as well as amusement for his mind; when care, and sickness,

and toil, were unknown, and summers and winters went and came, finding and leaving the tenant of the hut, the cave, and the rock, free and healthy, hopeful and happy.

"In those times, as I have heard, there was to be seen, not many miles from here, an elevated piece of ground, that slanted evenly in the direction of the valley, commanding a view of its wide extent, and receiving the benefit of the morning and noon-day sun. This piece of ground had, on its slope or brow, several patches of soft green sward; whilst in summer its summit, and the part stretching away in the direction of the moor, were covered with quite a little forest of brackens. This spot (on account of the accidents of its form and ferns) was known as the Bracken Bank. It was early chosen for a residence; so early, that scarcely a green field dotted the valley when the stones for the first hut were rolled together. For long time it was owned and occupied by a family of the name of Willbanks; which came from a jumbling together of Will o' the Bank, the name by which the head and founder of the family was known. When Will first declared for the Bank, he was strong and active, and skilled in all the cunning and crafts, ways and wisdom of the moors. He could repeat the wise sayings of his forefathers, and reckon up in order the heads of the tribes. The powers of planets and the properties of plants were known to Will. By the former, he could calculate destinies; by the latter, he could baffle death. The ways of witches and the freaks of fairies were as nothing to him, for they couldn't get within the charmed line that circled him about.

"Will left behind him sons, wise and worthy as himself; who, in their turn, left descendants, entrusted with the family's secrets, and proud of the family's fame. It was admitted on every common, that few could fish or fight, shout or shoot, talk or tack about in chase, like the Willbanks. Strong in arms and lithe in limb, wise in head and fleet at foot, they were feared by foes and courted by kin. One of Will's descendants, living at the Bank, had a daughter, an only daughter, fair and beautiful; his heart's pride and her mother's hope. For this child he seemed to live. To gratify her wishes was his pleasant occupation; to watch her growth his deepest

joy. Trout from twenty streams, and game from many hills, he brought for her. Labour she never knew, but spent her summer-days on the green sward where grazed her geese, or on the common, attended by her wolf-dog, with humming-bee around, and soaring lark above; and her winter nights, in hearing from his lips adventures and advice, the secrets of the healing art, and wonders of the world.

“When this daughter was just entering upon womanhood, her father died, leaving her and her mother sole occupants of the Bank. In this event they lost a protecting arm, no less than a providing hand; and felt in the power of any covetous carl who might itch to drive them from their homestead, and settle himself upon it. But fear was soon followed by fortune, for it being believed by the heads of many hills around that the wisdom of the Bank survived in the daughter, they leagued for her protection, and made it known by horse and horn that death would be to him who hurt or harassed her. Many a young heart pined and panted for the beauty of the Bracken Bank; and many gifts of turfs for winter fires, and offers to keep their kine from straying, came from such as lacked a lea, but wished to win her hand, and share the home that she and her mother owned. She was growing much in fame and favour, and many lips had begun to speak her praises, some extolling her person, some her healing arts, when a change came o’er her fortune that other fortunes changed. She was washing, as was her wont, one hot noon in summer time, in a cool brook that flowed at the bottom of the Bank, tended by her goat and wolf-dog, when horsemen bore down upon her, talking noisily and laughing loudly, riding sleeky beasts and wearing gaudy garments. Of course she stared and started, and like a timid fawn rushed away for home, her loose hair streaming in the wind, and her naked feet bounding o’er brook and stones, and past the tangling bramble bush, lightly as leaped the barking wolf-dog at her side, nimbly as flew the quick-paced goat hurrying up the green sward. The horsemen, surprised and startled, drew up their steeds, and halloed for a halt. Halt, however, she would not give, but hastened on until she gained her wondering mother’s side. With panting

heart she was telling her tale, and joying in her escape, when the mounted men drew up in front of the hut, and demanded, in loud and lordly tones, if the nymph of the brook had burrowed there. Loath to deal with big and bearded strangers, they answered not the call. Again it was given, and again they answered not. But burly, booted riders, with spur and spear, were not to be so fooled and foiled; hence they reined their beasts around the hut, to see its fastenings and contrive the capture of its inmates. Three dismounted and groped their way into the small abode, where they found child and parent crouching in terror, the younger hiding behind the coarse covering of the elder. The men spoke to them in words they did not know; but which they found to be kindly words, when one of the horsemen, who knew the language of the moors, had been called in.

“The captain of the company, as I call him, was struck with the wild beauty that dwelt in the eye, bloomed on the cheek, heaved in the chest, and hung about the whole form of the trembling maid. He would take her hand and touch her feet, thrust his fingers through her glossy hair and chuck her chin, twine his arm around her yielding waist and press her throbbing temples to his heart. He told her she’d ensnared him by her beauty, and must go with him. He meant no hard proposal, and would take no blunt denial. He was glad that he had found a female free from guile as the child unborn; free from taint as the mountain spring. He asked his men, if she was not a perfect gem? If it would not be cruel to leave her in such a place, to waste her sweetness in a hovel, or become the tool and slave of a common ranger? When they answered, ‘Yes, my lord!’ If in silk and satin, gold and jewels, she would not ornament a mansion? When again they answered, ‘Yes, my lord!’ If she ought not then to go with him, grace his board and be his guest, mend his ways and share his fate? When again they answered, ‘Yes, my lord!’ Oh! would not that face, he exclaimed, throw light into his failing eyes, and that folded form bring life into his withering arms! Would not his faltering step be likely to gain firmness attended by such an angel, and his latter days brightness and joyous-

ness in such a presence! Oh! would it not be so? And the old man rang as they answered again. 'Yea, yea, my lord!' 'Then go, she must,' he exclaimed. 'And go she shall! she shall!' they answered.

By presents and promises, threats and thanks, they brought her, amid fear and trembling, to say, that with her mother, and her wolf-dog, their goats and their kine, she would go with the captain and his company, and tend him as his child. Three days passed before the wagons and wearing apparel arrived, in which they were to leave the home they had so long enjoyed on the Bracken Bank. Three days of grief to them; of sorrow to others. As the news flew from hill to hill, that the Beauty had been summoned to the distant wolds, where folks lived in plenty and died of want: where one toiled and another gathered in his fruits, quarrelled and another fought it out; where were gaudy dresses that covered aching limbs, and large halls that held unhappy tenants, many swains groaned aloud, and many feeling mothers wept most bitter tears. From high cliffs and overhanging rocks, mourners watched the robbers and their booty down the valley, calling loudly for some witch or fairy to stay their march, strike the horsemen dead, and bring the mother and her daughter back.

Years passed, long years, and no tidings came to tell of weal or woe. Some reckoned that she'd perished by her own, or by another's hand; some that she pined in solitude, the captain keeper of her jail and ruler of her destiny; and others that she lived a queen, a merry queen, with neither care nor cross, ever young and ever loved. At length a traveller through the valley, vending wares, who tarried oft and long, and who carried gossip much more prized than any goods his pack contained, brought news. It was, that she had found a home in a hall, grand and spacious; that other feet ran her errands, and other hands made her what she wanted; that she was rich and fine, and might be proud and pert; but notwithstanding all, her spirits were ever drooping, and her health fast sinking. He told how that she had again regained the Bracken Bank. And that she had, indeed, the faded roses once

its prospects, light once more would fill her eye; washed by its waters, her complexion once more would be fair; and permitted to range its green sward and common, she should be again the laughing, fleet-footed, joyous creature she had been in days gone by. All pined to see her back again, skipping her old tracks with airy step, and gathering plants for her healing art. Some wondered she did not seek to tarry in the valley in summer-time, and live in her hall in winter; whilst others thought that the lea on the Bank should be lengthened, and a house made for her of the old homestead, not dreaming, alas! whereunto such a thing might grow.

“Like thoughts often live in unlike situations. So it seemed in this case; for one day in spring a company of men halted at the Bank, and demanded it in the name, and for the special use, of its former occupants. It had passed into other hands, and had received another hut. The captain of the company offered to purchase, giving notice that, failing there, he was prepared to seize and fight. To get it with the goodwill of those around, he promised to teach them many useful arts and bring them useful things. He promised to teach them how better to sow their rye, and plant for fruit; to dig and delve; to build and bank; to brew and bake; to buy and sell. He would make an Eden of the wilderness—a garden of the common. Many hearts leaped for joy, and many voices shouted, Come! Some, wise and wary, who had tarried on the hills all their days, shook their heads and closed their eyes, when they heard the news. Nothing good, they said, had ever come of anything new. Such fair words would be sure to end in foul ways. They durst not, however, oppose the captain, who built a large house and added to it a long lea. At length the beauty came, and many eager eyes were looking on, to see her who was returning to breathe the air that had suited so well her frame. There stepped from the wagon, one pale and thin, who insisted on walking, without help, across the green sward to the house. A lovely girl held her hand—’twas an only child; and wildly, said those who watched her, rolled the mother’s tear-filled eyes as they swept the surrounding scenery, and eagerly did she seem to push her

slender frame from spot to spot, pausing as with troubled thought when some familiar object met her gaze and refreshed her memory. 'Twas home! 'twas home! 'Twas the bird returning to the bush where it had chirped its first notes, but returning with broken wing and fallen feathers. 'Twas the once frisky fawn, treading again the green and wooded solitude, where, through long summer days, it had gamboled beside its dam; but treading it with limping gait and shattered frame, the result of a long and heartless chase, intended to yield men sport. ' 'Twould be sweet,' she was heard to exclaim, 'to lie down in such a spot and die.'

"And friendly would it have been, had death struck her down when that feeling was breathed. He tarried, however, through many long, long months, in which she eagerly strove to regain her health and recover her happy temper of mind. At early morn she was seen on the moors, hailing the sun as he rose behind Taker's-hill; and beside her favourite springs, she was often found reclining asleep at noon, with sweet smiles playing on her face, offsprings of some sunny vision of early days. Old haunts were often honoured by her visits, and old huts often had her welcome presence within their humble walls. But neither sunny morns nor bubbling springs, favourite tracks nor shade of favourite trees, would give what she so much desired. She asked and sought with tears, but asked and sought in vain. Then lowness came upon her, and tormenting fancies filled her mind. All things, she said, despised and mocked her. She begged the brook to wash away her ashy paleness, and cool her livid lips—to quench her burning thirst, and ease her throbbing temples; but though she washed and drank and laved, it bubbled on, heeding not her prayer. She begged the morning breeze to breathe again into her cheek bloom and beauty, and waft from distant hills such odours as it used to bring in days gone by; but though she sought it in its mildest forms and kindest moods, it sighed away, leaving neither fragrant scent nor sense of growing health. She begged the singing bird and skipping lamb, the rustling oak and waving fern, the morning sun and summer sky, to yield the joy they had been wont to give—to look as

sweet and fresh, as when she owned them as the true companions of her childhood. But no joy would they give; rather, as if revenging her unfaithfulness, they added to a melancholy that was fast becoming too sad for life. Then she ceased to go abroad at early morn and noon, giving place to rumours that told of madness and confinement, of ill-usage and foul jealousy, of the captain's tyranny and oaths, revelry and riots. Those rumours told of deep regret, at having urged the captain and his company to tarry in the valley, and of earnest intercessions on behalf of such as lived in huts, that their rights might be respected, and their homes left undisturbed.

"At length, a tale of deeper woe was borne from mouth to mouth, until it formed a topic around every fire, and amongst every knot of hinds. That tale was, that a frail form had been seen, during a midnight carouse at the Bank, to issue from the captain's house, and make in silence for the summit of a high crag, whence, with a wild scream, arms uplifted and hair disordered, it threw itself into a deep, stony gulf beneath, where it was found the following day, with every limb broken and every evidence of death having instantly taken place. That form was all that remained of the once idolised frame of the Beauty of the Bank. She was laid in a grave, dug where she had been wont to sit and pet her wolf-dog, and which for many winters was known by heaps of withered leaves, drifted by whistling winds, as if they would protect her mouldering bones from the cold they scattered from their wings. With her, perished hope of peace and plenty. Other halls rose in the valley, and green fields spread around them, but the promised better days never came. The captain and his company taught the labourer how to raise a better crop, but took themselves the harvest; how to delve for stones, but used them for their own behoof, in fencing off encroachments; how to shape a garment, but threw it o'er their own well-clad limbs; how to bake and brew, kill and roast, but kept the feasting and the merry-making to themselves. The poor man's rights and range grew daily less, and those who had inherited the wide common, were soon thrust into scanty cottages, and were even forbidden to touch the game on the hills, or the fish in the streams, on pain



of banishment or death. Dissatisfaction became general and curses loud ; and all shared a deep regret, that the captain and his company had ever been allowed to plant themselves in the valley. This regret harassed the spirit of the captain's victim even after death ; for rumours were soon afloat, how that her wandering ghost had been seen on the moors, and heard bemoaning and reproaching itself, as one that couldn't rest.

"From that day to this, the evil on has grown. Civilisation has spread, as changes and miscalled improvements are named; but it has only brought a deeper woe to the worker, and more cruel slavery to the servant. I look with disfavour upon every step from a state of nature, and believe that we can't do better than hasten back to such a state of things as prevailed up here, when the Willbanks were in their pride and glory. Woe be to them that introduce new fashions and factories ! that bawl out for the march of machinery and mind ! On them may fall the righteous judgments that overtook the Beauty of the Bank ; and to those who aid and help them, such things may end, as ended to the folks about the hills, the changes that befell the Bracken Bank."

Luty ceases, and for an instant, a death-like stillness mixes with the gloom that has begun to prevail. The fire has well-nigh winked out, and the candle, which has burnt down into the socket, is throwing deep shadows on to the wall, which suddenly disappear, when the flame, as if in sport, leaps from its little chimney-shaft, and as suddenly re-appear when it dives again into its obscurity. Luther, in imitation of Leechy, rises and buttons up his coat. This rouses Abel and Lucy, who seem as if waking from a dream. They thank Leechy for his legend, and press him to partake again of refreshment. With many thanks he declines, and intimating his readiness to start, he and Luther leave the old school-house. The latter departs full of wonder at the way in which Leechy has told the legend. Robert and Lucy express great surprise.

"I am not at all surprised," their father observes. "He's a strange man, is Luty ; but I have for some time believed him to be a clever man. Few can understand him. It were better, however, had we fewer such characters. He has too much fond-

ness and veneration for the past, to be friendly towards the present. They prompt him, as they do others, to depreciate and oppose changes and improvements. In this legend you have admiration of, and fondness for, a time, when men were little raised above the brute creation; and contempt of advantages and comforts, which kings at one time couldn't command. Yet this is but a strong manifestation of a common feeling. Men are ever lingering over, and coveting, the past; and yet an actual return to that past; a real, veritable contact with it—a contact, in which the halo of romance in which we encompass it, shall be brushed away—would be a grievance too hard to bear; a degradation to which none would submit.”

So spoke Abel, and we believe he spoke truth.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT THERE ARE EMPLOYERS OF LABOUR WHO CAN APPRECIATE MORAL WORTH, EVEN IN A POOR MAN.

"AND how will your friend Morgan get on, Luther, in his new situation?"

"Oh, swimmingly, mother, no doubt."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. I wish he may like it, and that it may suit him."

"Not much ground for fear on that score. He's a capital hand at adapting himself to a new post."

"Well, Luther, he has my best wishes, I'm sure. I like to see people get on and prosper, if they'll only be considerate enough to remember what they have been, and not put on foolish airs."

"I think, mother, we should all remember what we are and have been; as well those who are born to a fortune, as those who make one. But if foolish airs are unseemly in those who happen to be the authors of their own prosperity, they are much more so in the case of such as just walk by birth into prosperity. The former have something to be proud of—industry, enterprise, perseverance. The latter are just indebted to an accident."

"The latter have often family, my dear, for which no wealth can compensate. Whatever Robert Morgan may become in a worldly point of view, his want of family will exclude him from good society."

"And little he'll care for that, if he's made of the stuff I take him to be made of. But I really am surprised, mother, that you still cling to this old prejudice in respect to family. Just look at the thing soberly and seriously for a minute. Wherein would Robert Morgan now, with a few thousands, be inferior to any other young man having a few thousands,

though the son of a peer? Wherein would he be? He's honest, sober, intelligent, industrious. Who's to be preferred before such a character? When men——"

"Now, my dear, just save yourself the trouble of any elaborate comment on this prejudice, as you call it, of mine. It may be an absurd prejudice, but it exists; and so long as we have to do with the world, we shall have to do with it. I tell you, that Robert Morgan, with ten thousand pounds, and his intelligence, and so on, multiplied tenfold, would, in the eyes of good society, be nothing beside Mr. Joe Jolly. And why? Because the old squire, his father, is a man of family."

"And yet, mother, Joe Jolly is, as every one knows, a lying, hunting, gambling, drinking rascal."

"May be; yet it only shows the strength of the prejudice, and the truth and force of what I say."

"It shows the stupidity of the prejudice; and I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll fight with it to the last. Upon my word, mother, what a farce are our churches and Sunday schools! our preaching and reading of the Bible! What inconsistency to extol holiness as we do, and profess to believe the Bible where it tells us that God has made of one blood all nations to dwell on the face of the earth, and then prefer a dissipated to a virtuous young man, and set up one family as of better blood than another! If that inconsistency shouldn't be knocked over, I don't know what should."

"It's an inconsistency, my dear, that won't soon be knocked over, I can tell you. And it's one, let me remind you, that extends beyond the religious world. It is common, I am sorry to find, for young men at this day, to see inconsistencies in pious people only, and to bray away about them, much after the fashion of asses. There's our neighbour here, Mr. Forrest, who has just been allowing himself to be put in nomination as a candidate for the suffrages of the electors, the liberal electors of—somewhere, on the strength of his broad, well-known Radicalism. Of course, with him all are alike. Family blood is a mere family fancy. He has flattered the working classes mightily, by telling them that they were as good as others, and that for the life of him he couldn't see that one class was to

be preferred before another. And yet, it's not a year since he treated a respectable and well-to-do tradesman, who was aspiring to the hand of his niece, with cold, scornful contempt. And on what ground? Why, on the ground of his being of no family. The proud, philosophic Radical would not apply his principles at home. They would do very well for others, but not for his own connections. Had a clergymen done so, the thing would soon have been bruited the world over. And not only so: even your literary men, some of them mere literary fops, are in nowise above the same weak, absurd prejudice. There's that Mr. Skinner, who spent last summer up here, and who has made most of his money by holding up to ridicule the failings and weaknesses of men, this amongst the rest. Why this same man is ever boasting in private of his wife's aristocratic connections, and dragging the name of a cousin of hers into conversation, because he happens to be a baronet, albeit he has been for many years in a retreat for idiots."

"It's all humbug, mother, I'll say that. But here comes Morgan;" and Luther threw down a new book with which he was playing, in quite a huff.

The foregoing conversation took place in Mrs. Lee's cottage, the morning after the delivery of Leechy Luty's legend at the old school-house. It was a beautiful winter morning. A keen frost had purified the atmosphere, and left for the sun a clear, blue, upward path, most favourable for the dispensation of his light and heat. It had also—hoary genius that it is—tried its hand at ornamentation, weaving on windows icy network and fantastic figures, and suspending from ledges of roofs and rocks, icicles of every shape and length. Fields and fences, trees and houses, were robed in purest snow; and on every hand, right away to where the bending canopy seemed to dip into the plain's most distant point, the white covering stretched, blinding the eye that would look over and measure its extent. At the time this conversation was held, the sun, which had mounted to more than the stature of a giant above the horizon, was rolling along right gloriously, melting down into their primitive fluidity the frail manufactures of the preceding night, and causing large cakes of snow to drop here and there to the

ground from the sides of cottage walls and the drooping boughs of trees. It was a real cheering, bracing morning; one of those mornings that act as tonics on both mind and body. So it had acted on young Morgan; hence he looked remarkably healthy and cheerful, as he entered the breakfast-room of Mrs. Lee and her son. (He had been invited to breakfast, as that was the day on which he was to enter upon the duties of his new situation.) And the scene that presented itself was in no wise calculated to counteract—rather to add to—the exhilaration caused by the clear, cold morning.

In the first place, there was the fire, hot and red as a little furnace, opposing with might and main its old, hoary adversary, Winter; apparently resolved that, however despotically he might rule on wild mountains and barren moors, he should not sway his chilling sceptre there. Then, standing at a respectful distance, was a table, furnished with sundry plates of homely, yet wholesome fare. Inside a long, broad, highly polished fender, was a quantity of smoking ham, proclaiming, by certain floating signs, that it was being made a sacrifice for the general good. Planted in the centre of the hearth, and looking somewhat comical, was the old dog, snuffing with evident enjoyment the diminutive wreaths of steam ascending from the said sacrifice before him. At the window was Mrs. Lee, trimming and watering her plants—this had been her occupation during the dialogue with her son that we have recorded—who advanced and gave him a kind welcome; a welcome more cordial, it occurred to him, than any she had before given him.

Robert Morgan had begun to feel strongly attached to that dear old familiar word, Home, and to reckon, as amongst the choicest treasures of earth, those sweet visions that sometimes crowd the fancy, as the pen traces, or the lips pronounce it. But the reality had never come with such force before; that is, he had never before felt so strongly the difference between having a spot which one can call home, and drifting from place to place, as when he entered the breakfast-room of Mrs. Lee that morning. And as he sat down to eat, his mind took to wandering on the subject. He thought how that his highest wishes would be gratified, if ever he should be able to call such

a home his own, with Hilda Sykes to share it ; how that he couldn't conceive of anything more to be desired, or of anything to obtain which he was more willing to endure toil and inconvenience. Dim appeared to him the finest gold, and worthless the highest honours, when placed beside this, as objects of supreme pursuit. And was such a home, he asked himself, beyond the reach of plodding industry, upright conduct, true economy ? Possibly not. For such a goal he would start. He would use every energy, husband every means, employ every waking hour, with a reference to it. Everything should be so done as to facilitate his obtaining so glorious a prize.

Happy youth ! who happens to have such a well-defined and laudable object of pursuit. There is something to keep each talent in blissful exercise ; a something that brings to each day its work ; which saves from the danger and misery of a purposeless existence, and secures, by strong motive, the right using of the different powers of existence. Hope is nourished and activity stimulated ; and, as if the goal to which he tends held him by a restraining and attractive force, he is kept from the paths of the destroyer. Well is it for young men, when an aim, of which reason, conscience, and the Bible approve, fills, and employs the mind. Well when their glistening eyes are captivated by its charms, for then the gilded snares of evil will be likely to allure in vain. Well when their thoughts are pre-occupied by the good it is expected to yield, for then there will be less room for the suggestions of the tempter. Well when the yearning soul is kept panting to drink this visioned bliss, for then there will be little taste for stolen waters. Well ! even though the ideal should never be realised. Many a young man has been rendered invulnerable to temptation, and made active and happy, by having placed before him a captivating and commendable object of pursuit.

The morning meal was despatched amidst easy, homely conversation, which formed a happy and harmonious accompaniment to the soft jingle of cups and plates, knives and forks. Conversation which touched upon the legend of the past night, and the mysterious movements of its author ; which then

glanced at Simeon Sykes and his sister Hilda, slightly impinging upon the growing vice of the former, and the increasing gloom of the latter; which attempted to penetrate the future, and to estimate the good fortune in reserve for the village; which then snatched up hastily a few of the incidents that had befallen Robert Morgan in his wanderings, and which then flitted hither and thither, ending at the counting-house of Bower and Bray, and reminding Luther and Morgan that they ought to repair thither without delay. It was to all parties an instructive conversation. Mrs. Lee learnt, to her full satisfaction, that Robert Morgan really knew himself and his position, and that there was very little likelihood that he would array himself in a costume of manners and airs unbecoming his origin and circumstances. Luther learnt that his mother was fast coming to his way of thinking, in regard both to the Morgans and other parties. And Robert learnt something from Mrs. Lee, that yielded him much joy. It was, that Hilda would in a few days take up her abode at the cottage, where, he had no doubt, she would daily grow wiser and better, and where she would, at least, be safe. The conversation was continued by the two young men on their way to Bower and Bray's mill.

"I wonder, now," Luther observed, "if that Blamins has been getting at Hilda by any means, that she seems so sad and shy? Or if Sim is hunting and persecuting her with some proposal of his? He would do it for a five pound note any day."

"I hardly think," Robert replied, "that Hilda would give ear to anything coming from that quarter."

"Of course that all depends upon what it is. There are few females can resist a proposal backed by the promise of a good house, a carriage, and fine dresses. Although such things are in no way essential to happiness in the married state, yet with many they count, alas! for everything. Now, as this Blamins is doubtless a lying, lazy fellow, who'll do anything to gain a point, it's just possible that he may have promised Hilda all this and much more, if she'll only listen to him, and Hilda may be just now in the torment of indecision. Mark, I don't say she is, I only say it may be so."



"I'll leave England, Luther. I can't bear the sight of Hilda in the possession of another."

"Nonsense! Don't be a fool now. He's not got her yet."

"But if that's the way he's likely to work, it's done. They'll all back it."

"Don't talk so fast. I only want half-an-hour with her, and I'll do for that fellow. At least if I know myself. They may back it as they like, but if she'll only believe me when I come to talk it over, she'll be as firm as a rock of granite."

"If she was at your cottage, she would be all right. I could then be easy."

"So she would," Luther replied. "And she shall soon be there, if possible, for it must be a miserable state of existence to be as you are. But don't show down at mouth to-day. It'll soon be all right. Here's Bray looking out. Good morning, Mr. Bray! Does this suit your Arctic notions?"

The person thus addressed was standing at the gate leading into the mill-yard. He wore a fustian jacket and trousers, and appeared much more like a mechanic than a master. He was a thin, sharp, and rather low man, with a small, but expressive eye, and a way, when spoken to, of turning up his face, as a caged bird will turn up its head, when one whistles for its benefit.

"Good morning to *you*," he replied. "I don't know," he went on, accompanying the observation with a good-humoured smile, "that I have any particularly Arctic notions, Mr. Luther. It's a beautiful winter-morning, and for that reason I like it, for you see I like winter in winter, and summer in summer."

"Everything in its season, Mr. Bray. Well, I think Morgan and I agree to that;" and Mr. Bray having opened the gate, the two young men walked in.

The mill-yard, surrounded by high smoked walls, and covered with sludge and slack, and engine ashes, presented a rather begrimed appearance, but at the same time a somewhat bustling scene. It being breakfast-hour, the "hands" were disposed and occupied much according to their own whims. Some were leaning out of high windows supping porridge from deep cans. Some were seeking amusement in snow-balling;

whilst others, with pieces of bread that appeared very white in their soiled fingers, were running hither and thither under the happy delusion that they were sliding. As Robert crossed the yard with Luther and Bray, his quick ear caught cutting, under-toned observations, that had reference to himself. One called attention to him as "a petticoat-man and a lickspittle;" as "a doofy, sheepish dog," who durst'n't "lake with the lads for fear of getting a bat." One young woman created quite a laugh by some rude allusion to Hilda Sykes and his leaving home. One boy hoped he wasn't going to "crow" there; and another declared he wasn't going "to be mastered by that old 'figure.'" Morgan was known to many of the "hands," but wasn't liked by them—wasn't liked, however, for the simple reason that he kept aloof from them in order the better to pursue an onward and upward career.

We here touch upon one of the darkest and most painful features in the conduct of working men towards one another. It was then, and is still to a mournful extent, the case, that the moment working men perceive that one of their number has decided to be steady, economical, pious, and to raise himself in society, he is exposed to a regular persecution. Traps are laid to inveigle him into intemperance. Provoking things are said to him to fill him with anger, and call out some ebullition of rage. He is challenged to fight, that on declining to do so he may be denounced as a coward. Sorters at the board, weavers at the loom, smiths at the anvil, mechanics in the shop, have been passed through a martyrdom because they would not run into the same excess of folly as their associates in labour. Let working men learn not to *hinder* their own order in attempting self-elevation, before they blame the middle classes for not *helping* them to rise in life.

The counting-house, to which they made their way, and which was to be the scene of Robert's labours, was a rather small, very untidy, and somewhat inconvenient affair. It was a partitioned corner of a long room. It contained two old desks and stools; an easy chair, whose bandaged arms and greasy, worsted-covered cushion, testified of free and frequent usage; a small stove, and pipes and tobacco. Piled heaps of

parcels and packets buttressed every side of its board walls; whilst files of letters and discoloured invoices hung from every peg and nail by which it was possible for a hook to hold.

"There, try that," Luther observed, pointing Morgan to one of the stools as he shut the door. "You know, of course, what that youngster is up to, Mr. Bray?" And Luther rubbed his hands over the stove, as if the trick, of which he assumed Mr. Bray had a perfect knowledge, afforded him unbounded joy.

"I suppose," Mr. Bray replied, standing at the desk at which Robert had seated himself, "I suppose he's up to learning the ways of a counting-house, and the ins and outs of business?" And the little sharp man in fustian turned up his eye like a curious little bird.

"Ay, he's come to spy us out, and will take count of our knavish tricks. We must now have a care what we do, Mr. Bray. By-the-by, I shan't have much to do, I guess. Four of us for the paltry work of this shop! We have more horses than harness, that's very clear. But it's all been settled by the higher powers, so I suppose we must submit."

"I—I shall be happy to submit, Mr. Luther. And how is your father, Mr. —" he was going to say Morgan, but just then recollecting that he was only a handloom weaver, it wouldn't come. So he said "Robert, Mr. Robert. And how is your father, Mr. Robert?"

"Thank you, sir, he's very well. Do you know father?"

"Oh, yes!" he promptly replied. "Many years ago I took lessons of your father in algebra. He's very clever at figures. I'm sure we are proud to receive the son of so worthy a man."

"Hear, hear," Luther exclaimed, and washed away over the stove, as if it was of the utmost moment that he should rub all the skin off his hands. Just then Mr. Bower entered, and with him a hoarse, heavy noise, like the rushing of many waters. It was the machinery that was being put in motion. He brought with him quite an assortment of smiles and nods, "Good mornings," and "Happy New Years," which he distributed with a prodigality that would have shocked one accustomed to dole out such things with a punctilious regard to riches and rank. Those offered to Luther were as cordial

as any given to Mr. Bray; whilst Robert's were in nowise frozen, but came with a gush as warm as royalty itself could have reasonably expected.

"And how is your father, my young friend?" Mr. Bower resumed, as, seated in his easy chair, he filled the head of a long pipe from a jar containing tobacco, which Luther had handed to him. "Your father has always kept himself decent, and given himself to learning, and, I think, deserves more marks of respect than he has yet received."

Here Mr. Bower paused, to turn the head of his pipe to a lighted match that had been placed in his right hand, and Mr. Bray took advantage of the said pause to turn his bird's eye up to Robert Morgan's face, to observe, doubtless, the effect of Mr. Bower's prefatory remarks. As the curling smoke began to ascend and spread itself out like a white pall over his head, he recommenced:

"I am glad to receive you into our counting-house, and do assure you that we shall do our best to give you a thorough knowledge of the business. We are glad of an opportunity of showing the working men about here, how ready we are to help one of their order when we see him determined to help himself."

"Yes," Mr. Bray chimed in, "we shall be happy to do our best for you."

They had a long but agreeable chat, on a variety of topics, during which Robert felt himself called upon to thank them rather frequently, and Luther to smile very pleasantly; whilst Mr. Bray, for some reason, caused his small, winking eyes to perform a round of most unaccountable movements. As for Mr. Bower, he laboured away with such amazing zeal at his pipe, that they were soon canopied by quite a milky way of smoke, into which his fantastic figures melted, as fast as he blew them. As they left the counting-house, Mr. Bray lingered behind his senior partner, to invite the young men to spend that evening with him at his house, observing that he should deem it a great favour and a high honour. Altogether, Robert was much pleased with the manner of his introduction to the scene of his new labours. For that day he was to be

Luther's pupil. The latter proved himself a most unassuming master; the former a very docile scholar. The day passed agreeably away, all the more so for the excitement supplied by the prospect of spending the evening with Bray.

Mr. Bray lived alone, or nearly so, at this time. He was unmarried, and received no help in household affairs, if we except a little supplied on special occasions by a sister of his who lived near. His house was a good, and comparatively, a new one, and had many undeveloped capabilities. This reminds us of a most astonishing thing about Mr. Bray, and that was his vast, undeveloped resources in the housekeeping line. He had nearly everything, but used hardly anything. His house had a large, pompous front door, but it wasn't opened once a month on an average, as he preferred slipping in and out at the back. The two spacious front rooms had a most heavy time of it, as scarcely any one ever awoke their echoes. The in-shutters of one of them were for a long time partially closed, just admitting sufficient light to reveal sundry strong packing-cases and hampers, filled to overflowing with wares, from which the uncarpeted floor had been freely sprinkled with hay and straw, probably by enterprising rats and mice. In one corner was a huge bundle of rolls of "papering," which suggested the probability of the wilderness being at some time inhabited. Its neighbour and fellow was a little better off in respect to furniture, which, however, was in a state of utter confusion, some objects being actually enveloped in the wrappings in which they had arrived at first. A beheaded clock case, tall and handsome; a sofa on its side, holding out four stumpy feet; several large, sleepy chairs, piled one upon another, as if they had been trying a clumsy game of leap-frog, together with heaps of carpets and a couple of globes, were amongst the more noticeable of the articles it contained. The rusty grates told that they were rarely warmed with fires, and the climbing bell-wires, that they were seldom pulled; for here and there adventurous spiders had taken advantage of them, to give width and firmness to their dusty webs. Upstairs as well as down, things were thus packed and huddled together. The kitchen and one bedroom were the only places where order and activity existed.

This state of things led, at times, to what most people would have reckoned great inconvenience. When, for example, he would entertain a friend for a night, it was quite a task to fit up a bed. The linen would be at the bottom of a deep drawer of a chest, which were sure to be hid behind a heap of other things. After much rummaging, blankets, thick and soft, would be found in a pile of stuffs reared in a corner of his own small sleeping room. Often it was impossible to serve up even an ordinary supper for a couple of friends, without a great deal of fuss. There would be a deficiency of crockery, perhaps, for the simple reason that it happened to be on a sideboard against which some newly arrived and almost immovable piece of furniture had been placed. Or the deficiency would be in knives and forks, when Mr. Bray would observe that he knew he had a few dozens, but believed they had not been unpacked, and that he really couldn't then place his hand upon them. Yet he wasn't by any means unhappy. He knew not the use, and therefore felt not the need, of a tithe of the things thrown about him. He had them because he had bought them; and he had bought them because he had heard of other manufacturers purchasing such things. Perhaps he had an idea of living in style at some time; of taking to himself a household genius who would be able to say, in a practical and effective manner, Let there be order and convenience, show and comfort! However, let that pass.

Mr. Bray, though living alone, wasn't a shy, cold, unsympathising man. By no means. He was very liberal in a quiet way—in what will now be deemed an almost old-fashioned way. Sunday schools and chapels were generously remembered by him. The former particularly so. He would say, "As a patriot, I support them. I look upon the young as an important part of the nation. I see amongst them those who, in the future, will constitute the British legislature; fill the civic offices of the state; carry on our trade; own all our wealth; and be invested with the responsibility of forming the mind of the generation immediately succeeding. Hence the importance of their being properly trained. By training you may affect vitally the future character and welfare of the nation. Say

that the present generation grows up lax in principle and vile in conduct. The results are very serious. The great trusts of the nation will run the risk of being abused; its offices of being indifferently filled; its trade of being ruined; and the work of education of being grossly neglected. Now, Sunday schools I look upon as important agencies in the training of the young. There are parents who cannot, and parents who will not, bring up their children as they should do; and unless others perform the work, it is neglected." Of course Mr. Bray was weak to look with such interest upon the young, and very illogical to suppose that moral training could at all affect their after life; and not less so in seeing the least connection between such training and our Sunday schools. Of course they are tyrants who would restrain the child on a bright sunny Sunday. Let it go free. Don't trouble your head about it. You go your way, on a "cheap trip," or elsewhere, and let it go its way. The colt that's allowed to grow up into a wild horse, will yield most tamely to the bit and spur!

Mr. Bray had another failing, which will render it impossible that he should find favour in the eyes of the present enlightened and advanced generation. He somehow admired and revered the pulpit. Nay, he countenanced the training of young men for the ministry. We don't say he would have done so now, seeing that our wise men have shown it to be such an absurd, mischievous, expensive sort of thing. He did so then, however. And he even invited such young men to his house, and helped them out of his purse. Many a student, treading the weary way of cottage life, has been gladdened by the unobtrusive liberality of Mr. Bray.

He looked forward that day with pleasing anticipations to the meeting in the evening, with Luther and Robert, at his house. His sister and he exerted themselves with commendable zeal and skill, in the way of preparation, and managed to bring into existence a very flattering combination of results, including a clean kitchen, glowing fire, roasting beef and baking pies.

"There, I think we shall do here pretty well," Mr. Bray observes, as, just returned from his room washed and shaven, he looks approvingly at the kitchen.

"You'd need, indeed," his sister replies. "A king couldn't wish for a more comfortable place."

"You must put things in readiness for supper, Maggy, before you leave. And be sure and tell old Jim that he needn't come to bed before ten to-night. Halloo! they are not here so soon as this surely!"

There is a loud knock at the door. Maggy opens it cautiously. A form, just visible on the background of snow, speaks. It asks for Robert Morgan. When told that he's not there, it is inclined to grumble. Mr. Bray joins his sister. He interrogates the form of which he can see something by the aid of the light in Maggy's hand. It has a very long whip, and to all appearance about as many coats as it can well carry. It looks as if it had something to do with a wagon. It must see this Morgan. It has been at his home, but was sent hither, and can't afford to return until it has seen him. Mr. Bray tells it that he is expected there shortly, adding, that if it would like to wait, it is at liberty to walk in and do so. It shambles across the threshold to a chair, as if it had an angry corn in each toe. Puss throws herself at once into the form of an arch at sight of so strange a figure, the long whip exciting special abhorrence. This article hasn't the notion somehow of making itself at home, so Mr. Bray relieves the wagoner of it, which is a great mercy, as it has somewhat confused him by bringing a whole oat-cake on to his head, and by overturning two loaded sauce-boats. He removes his hat and pops it under his chair, watched closely and curiously by puss, observing that it's a pretty good pull up from the turnpike. Mr. Bray says it is, and concludes he's come thence. Yes, he has. He's left his team, than which a better was never yoked, at the Brown Cow, where he "allas" baits when coming back. There is silence, during which Mr. Bray does a fair stroke of business with his small eyes. The stranger shoves back his chair in deference to the hot fire, and strokes his head, taking care with his heels to carry with him his hat; which performance puss eyes askance and with considerable suspicion. Mr. Bray doesn't like to sit with the man and say nothing; so making an attempt at ease and familiarity, he carelessly observes,—



"You know Robert Morgan, of course?"

"Something of him. Not much. He's gone down with me once, when we had a little talk, as I often hev. He asked me if I would fish up a bit uv a secret for him and bring it without loss o' time. I think I've got it, or something like it, and na I wish t' give it him, hev done with it, and get away."

Mr. Bray feels that the man has some consequence about him, being the holder of a secret, and so assumes a little gravity. He orders Maggy to place before the stranger a pot of beer, and betakes himself to an old box full of old and new books. He can't fix his mind to the page, however; so, after wandering about for twenty minutes, he re-enters the kitchen. Footsteps are heard. The two young men enter. They eye the stranger with a little curiosity. He smiles at Robert, and holding out a hand without rising, says,—

"The same young man, I see."

"What!" the young man observes, seizing the proffered hand, "Nelson? It is, I declare. How in the world do you come to be here? You don't live with Mr. Bray, do you?"

"Why at present I do, you see," he replies, giving a side nod at the table, on which are the pot of beer and a plate of beef, considerably placed there by Maggy for his special benefit. He thinks this quite a sly, lawyer-like reply, calculated to set Robert's thoughts at sixes and sevens, and he chuckles himself into a glow, as he observes what he takes to be the amazement and confusion of Robert. It's something really smart, the like of which hasn't been under that roof before. Compassionating, however, Robert's perplexity, and thinking it too bad to bear down so heavily upon him all at once, he considerably remarks, with a shuffle and a touch of remorse, that he's only joking; that he's not been there more than an hour; and that he has come to see him, Robert Morgan. Can he have a word with him alone? Will he go "a gaters" with him?

"No," says Mr. Bray, "you had better walk into one of the front rooms. They're without fires, but may be you'll not be long."

They follow Maggy into the one with the beheaded clock

and romping chairs. She places them each one, pushes from its corner a small table that runs on castors, puts the candle upon it, and withdraws. Nelson follows to see that the door is really closed; bends his body to scan the key-hole; puts his ear to it and listens; then returns to his chair, observing, that he's "no sure they may not be up to the old trick of hearkening."

"Well," he says, placing his hat underneath the table, and putting on a very grave expression of face, "you recollect, young man, that when you went down with me last November, on your way to Oatlands, you particularly wished me to pick out anything I might be able respecting two men who journeyed with us a short way that night?"

"Yes," Robert says; "all right, go on."

"You thowt they were not uv the right sort. I'd not liked 'em for some time, and don't now like 'em—far, very far from it. Do you know, they've someha smelled it aht ut I wasn't alone that night. When they came the time after, they were very quizzly and saucy, and rummaged the whole wagon before they'd saddle. They said they didn't believe in my crockery; it could hearken, and so on. I winked at the horses, and said to myself, I'll take up whomeever I please, and put them daan when and wheereever they may wish, for any one. This set me more again 'em; and last night, or rayther this morning, heving a fair chance, I resolved to try my trick. So I pretended to be poorly, and rayther deaf, when they came to the wagon, and rolling under an old cover near to 'em, I asked 'em to keep an eye on the horses while I tried to nap for hawf a naar. They were soin in earnest conversation. I couldn't learn all that it is desirable to know about 'em, but what I did learn, I thowt it proper to acquaint you with at once."

"Quite right," Robert observes. "Go on."

"Is there—" he proceeds very cautiously, lowering his voice to a whisper almost, and casts furtive glances at the door—"Is there any one about here of the name of Sykes Farmstead?"

He looks inquiringly into young Morgan's face, who musingly repeats,—

"Sykes Farmstead? There is a Sykes living at a house called the Farmstead. Mr. Sykes of the Farmstead."

"That'll do," Nelson observes, giving Robert a very sagacious sort of nod. "That'll do. And does he live alone?"

"Why, yes, in a way he does."

"Has he two nevies?"

"Yes."

"Is one of 'em called Tim, or Shim, or Sim?"

"Yes, Sim. Simeon properly."

"Is this Mr. Sykes about to build a mill, or anything in that line?"

"Well, yes, I may say so, for it's all the same."

"Very well, then, hear me." He speaks low and slowly, leaning forward as if bent by some spell. "That man—is to be robbed—or murdered—or put out of the way—or—something. Some ill fortune is being hatched for him—which is to come upon him the first suitable night—between next change and first quarter. These men are to do it, or to see that it is done; and are to be paid a hundred pounds for it. The prime mover and paymaster they don't know—but they don't doubt getting the cash the very hour the thing is done. And this is what I had to say, and what I wanted you to hear."

Nelson, having got rid of the responsibility of his secret, throws himself back with an air of great relief, and watches curiously the effect of his announcement upon his auditor. That auditor rests his arms on the table, and stares very hard at the light before him. The wagoner, to draw some remark from him, perhaps, takes up his hat, and puts on an appearance of intending to depart.

"Stay," says Robert, "I must know something more about this. It so happens that this Mr. Sykes is a friend—patron, I ought to have said—of mine. It is very strange news," Robert observes, biting his thumb-nails. "Very strange news. Who are to be employed, do you think, besides those men?"

Nelson doesn't know.

"And of course you didn't get hold of anything pointing to the party, or parties, employing them."

"No."

"Was a person of the name of Leechy Luty mentioned?"

That name had occurred in the conversation of the men, but he couldn't say what part, if any, he was to play.

Well, Robert is obliged to him, and gives him money. He accepts it with many thanks, and says he must away. He lingers for a minute. He hopes that his young friend will not let it be known that he has thus betrayed his passengers. He is a great deal on the roads, and it might lead to his being handled "rayther roughly." Oh, of course not, Robert replies. He moves towards the door, but steps back, and casting his eyes over the room, asks if the gentleman living there isn't going to flit? No! why? Only things appeared rather *unrud*, and he wished just to say that if he was moving down his way, he would take him and his furniture as cheap and safe as any carrier. He limps into the kitchen, and having received his long elastic rod and line, makes off, by a stumble down the steps, into the darkness. Robert asks Luther to re-enter the room with him. He gives him Nelson's statement. His friend seems perplexed. Suddenly he asks,—

"Did you promise him money if he would bring you news?"

"Yes."

"Bah! the old knave has just been stuffing you. It's all fudge, Morgan. I don't believe a word of it."

"But I do."

"You have just been duped, my lad, and I would advise you not to say a word about it to any one, for your reputation's sake."

Robert feels a glow upon his cheek, but says nothing, except that they had best join Mr. Bray. Robert apologises for his long absence. They say nothing about it to their entertainer. They spend with him a pleasant evening, and then depart, with many good wishes and hearty good nights.

## CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH MR. ERRTON AND OTHER PARTIES APPEAR TO  
GREAT ADVANTAGE.

As Robert Morgan slowly directed his steps homeward that night, his thoughts ran on after this fashion :—"It may be that I have been duped, Luther Lee, but I don't believe I have. Nelson's statements agree so well with what I heard, that I can't doubt he speaks the truth. I trust I'm not the greatest fool going. However, as this foul deed isn't to be committed just yet, there will be time to think about it, and, if it should be deemed necessary or prudent, to prepare for it. And now in the meantime about Hilda. She's a shy fish without any doubt. There was no need to quit my company so abruptly and unceremoniously this afternoon. You musn't suppose, Hilda, that I shall stand it everlastingly; because I shan't. A little more of your huffishness will drive me clean out of the category of your admirers. I now feel strongly disposed to try if it isn't possible to stir up my whole nature against you. I think there must be a limit to my endurance, and may be I'm approaching it. I'll not do you any harm; but if you play this game much longer, I most certainly will use every art that I can invent to cool this foolish flame, and to wrench even my thoughts from you. I'll do *that*, miss;" and as he said so, he threw with great force to the ground a hard ball of snow that he had been rolling almost unconsciously in his hands. "I must begin, as our Lucy says, to respect myself. And I *will* do. I'll not hover about one who slights me as if I carried pestilence in my breath. My prospects are a little too good to necessitate that, I hope. Granted that your mother is against it. That doesn't justify you in saying neither one thing nor another plain out. May be you don't really love me! I'm too tame

too common-place! You females want something dashing, dazzling, romantic! Wild, care-for-nothing fellows, who'll risk their neck in an elopement! That's what you like. Something after the style of Blamins. You've a wonderful propensity for ruin. Moth-like, the more imminent it is, the more gaily and giddily you flutter about, and rush at it;" and he laughed scornfully in the darkness as he thus talked with himself.

It was a foul surmise, as respected Hilda at least; and, as if to punish him for it, there rose up before his excited imagination that slender, graceful form, head of auburn hair, and round, idolized face, in the embrace and complete power of Blamins. In his power willingly. It was a sight which, with all his bravado, he couldn't contemplate, for he staggered in the stony road like an intoxicated man. "Suspense," he continued, on recovering the shock of his own thoughts, "is a torturing sort of thing; especially if there happen to be mixed up with it a touch of jealousy. I'll have an end of this. I'll be off the spikes, even if it's into the fire."

No allusion was made by either of the young men to Nelson's information for several days. Nor was Hilda mentioned between them for three days. Luther then introduced her as they were leaving the counting-house.

"Oh Morgan," he said, "there is another matter. Mother wished me to ask you if you could and would come to tea to-morrow. A great event is to come off. We then receive Hilda at the cottage for good, and mother wishes to have a few friends, by way, I suppose, of honouring the event. I expect Uncle Sykes of the Farmstead and her father. Will you come?"

Robert gladly promised to do so, resolving that if he should have an opportunity he would ask Hilda in what relation they were to stand to each other in the future. He would make a formal offer, and demand to be accepted or rejected.

The event came off, but unfortunately for its reputation it wasn't very highly honoured. That is, there weren't many friends, and the few there were were under the necessity of leaving immediately after tea; excepting, of course, young

Morgan. Even Luther found out that he had an engagement. Mrs. Lee herself hardly did honour to the event in the strict sense of the term; for after directing her servant to gather up the few ashes the hot fire had dropped, and to sweep up the hearth, and after having placed Hilda's work-basket on the table, and pressed Robert to take the corner-chair, she begged them to excuse her an hour, and withdrew.

Left alone with Hilda, and with small risk of interruption, Robert saw that his opportunity had come; so, after contemplating her beauty for a moment in silent rapture as she bent over her fancy needlework, he observed, with a little tremulousness of voice, that he was glad they happened to be alone, as he had a subject to mention of very grave importance.

Hilda lifted up her head, shook back her auburn ringlets, and looked at him in thoughtful silence.

"To come right down upon the point at once, Hilda, I desire to know if you really accept my offer, and if I am to regard us as engaged to each other?"

"I think I answered that question last week, Robert. Why repeat it?"

"Because one of us must have misunderstood the reply."

"How so?"

"Your treatment of me lacks confidence and respect."

"You forget the conditions on which I consented to stand engaged to you. You are exacting."

"I hope not. The terms were, that the thing should be kept quiet until you'd had time to bring your mother and brother to consent to it. Not that you should be distant and shy with me. If I haven't your heart, Hilda, I would rather not have your hand. You have won my affections and esteem, and to try to forget you will be to try to forget what gives life its charms to me. But that I'll attempt, rather than consent to have aught less than your entire self."

"I trust, Robert, I'm not so foolish as to promise to bestow my hand where my heart hasn't previously gone. You want to see an ardour of affection of which my present circumstances will not admit. And in that I think you are unreasonable."

"I hope I'm not unreasonable."

"Are you jealous?"

"Hilda, hear me. I don't usually trifle, and in this matter, at any rate, I'll not trifle. I want the thing settled finally one way or the other. Say that you'll have me, and risk all consequences; or say that you're not decided, and I've done with the thing. I've done with it, even if my heart bleed itself to death. What do you say?"

She spoke not, but fixed her eyes in a steady gaze upon the candle before her. Shortly he resumed, his voice faltering with deep emotion:—

"Hilda, you know me! You know that I'm prepared to devote my life to you if need be! and twenty years hence, if it pleased God to spare us, you would find me as true and as thoroughly attached as ever. I'm yours, if you will emphatically declare for me; but this suspense I'll not endure another night. Now what say you?"

He rose to his feet as he submitted the question, as if to indicate that he was prepared to march right off at once, if the answer should happen to be in the negative.

The blue eyes, steadfastly fixed upon the candle, gradually filled with tears, until, overflowing their banks, they rolled in a hot current down her cheeks.

"Well," he went on, after a moment's pause, his back to the fire, and his eyes turned down in the direction of his boots, "I shall look upon you as undecided. Your silence means that. I shall conclude that you have just been tampering with me, and will leave here and home, and go again, God knows whither."

He had scarcely finished when a head fell heavily on his shoulder, and a sobbing form threw itself into his arms.

"Oh, Robert!" she faltered out, "you do not know me, or you would not talk thus. I'm neither insincere nor faithless. Do, do-believe me! You charge me with being cold and shy. In the presence of others I may have been; but don't you recollect that you consented to allow me to act such a part for a short time, because of the opposition of my mother and brother? Don't think ill of me because, under the weight of a dreadful necessity, I may have concealed the ardour of my



affection. You have my heart ; a heart that never shall, that never can, be another's."

"Now, Hilda," he replied, much excited, "give up this crying at once, and do pardon me for having thus wronged and pained you. I feel all remorse for what I've said ; but I'm apprehensive that there is a plot to ruin you, and was suspicious that you were becoming a consenting party. Do you know anything of a person of the name of Blamins ?"

"No," she answered, wiping away her tears, and leaning composedly on his arm.

"Has your brother ever mentioned to you a young man, of dashing address, with whom he's rather intimate ?"

She blushed deeply, and observed, with a touch of confusion, that he had introduced to her a man whose acquaintance he begged her to cultivate, but she had refused to do so.

"And does he now say nothing to you about him ?"

She couldn't say he didn't, but would assure him it was all in vain.

"Now, Hilda, you must be on your guard. This man—a desperate man—is trying, with the concurrence—perhaps co-operation—of your brother, to effect your ruin. I wish Simeon would cut him. Why in the world does he go with such fellows ?"

"I can't tell. I fear he's some way in this man's power. I wish brother would take more to you and Luther."

"Your mother would spit upon him if he were to do so. But what makes you think that Simeon is in the power of this Blamins ? for we're speaking of the same person no doubt."

"Because he seems so wishful that he shouldn't be thwarted."

"How thwarted ?"

"As to his designs in reference to me."

"Then he really has had the rascality to advise you to receive the attentions of this villain ?"

"He's not merely advised ; he's pressed and begged, and last week, he threatened. It's all the same, he says, whom I marry ; and I may, therefore, as well marry his man, as one chosen by some one else. If I won't, it will be worse for both him and me."

"Then he'd sell you for his own ends?"

"So it would appear. But he never shall; yet you see in what a difficult situation I'm placed, and why I wish our engagement to be kept a secret for a while. I fear Simeon would do something rash, if he heard of it now. I somehow fear him, he's so different from what he was."

"I'll tell you what must be done? You must keep, for the present, out of the way of your brother. I see that. You must indeed, or you'll be whipped off some dark night in no time. He's desperate, and desperate men use desperate means. I'm glad you're here, for you'll be safer with your aunt than at home."

"So am I glad. And now, Robert, give me a promise that you will keep all this a profound secret for the present."

He gave the promise; and they chatted long and pleasantly together. Past misunderstandings were jocosely touched upon and heartily laughed at; and it was firmly believed that such strange, monstrous things could never more exist between them. In fact, explanations, and pardons, and vows, were so freely dealt in; it was declared so emphatically that all by-gones should be by-gones; all pertaining to the future was so minutely and satisfactorily arranged, and they expressed, moreover, such a high opinion of each other's capabilities to drive away sorrow, that there didn't appear the remotest possibility of their ever being unhappy again. They, in a way, bid the world adieu that night, and entered, through the busy gates of hope, that dream-land, where all is bliss; but a bliss that is never gathered! A bliss that waves in golden ears, and springs in gushing fountains, to eager credulous lovers; but in ears that elude the touch, and in fountains that never lave the lip!

They, however, were happy. Happier than many who were abroad that night. We happen to have been made acquainted with one instance—the case of a young man—to which we ought here to allude, perhaps. That night, more than an hour after Robert Morgan had entered the school-house, cheerful and buoyant, to the great delight of his sister, this young man emerged from Leechy Luty's hut, peeping about and listening,

like one having a hand reeking with warm blood, and a soul troubled with the heavy guilt of murder. As he sought the rugged path leading down the Roughs, he threw on an old cloak, and brought the flapping brim of his round, grey hat, over his ears, with the intention of defying, either the cold, or the scrutiny of any chance stragglers who might happen to be more inquisitive than would be agreeable to him. With sullen countenance and cautious step, he held on his way as if bound for M——; but instead of following the highway, he turned into a footpath, much frequented in summer-time, which led to a decent house, that had a barn, stable, sheds, and so on, attached.

At the door of this house he halted, and having taken off his cloak, and turned up the flapping brim of his hat, tapped gently. The door was just pulled ajar by a servant girl, when he asked, as well as a barking dog would allow him, if Mr. Errton was in. She said she would see, and chucking with her foot the under jaw of the dog that was thrusting its nose into the small opening, thereby murdering a bark in its birth, she shut the door, put on the chain, and left the young man to entertain himself with her retreating footsteps. Presently he heard footsteps returning, accompanied by a candle, which fact was proclaimed by a beam that had found its way through the keyhole, and stuck like a button of light to his waistcoat. The button, however—as generally happens with that class of appendages—very soon disappeared by reason of the darkening of the keyhole, which darkness arose from the application of a mouth to the said aperture, which demanded in a tone of great authority, who might be there that time of night, when all honest people had betaken themselves to bed? The reply was, that Simeon Sykes was there. The voice essayed to speak again, but the underdone night air rushing through the keyhole, and down the throat up which it was forcing its way, the two seemed to come into violent collision, and to knock each other unceremoniously over. The slight mishap was soon set right, however, and the voice, fairly on its way again, came out with the question,—

“And what, or whom, does Simeon Sykes want? Is his,

business something that won't admit of being put off until daylight gets back again? I say, Sim!" and the voice dropped to a whisper, "there's small matters of daylight now, isn't there? The sun's running short time, when there's a first-rate demand for his work. You know somebody who wouldn't do so, don't you?"

"Come, Miss Errton," he replied; "don't try to be funny this time of night. I want to see the master. Is he in?"

"Well, say your business. If I don't get to know now, I shan't get to know. These are my best times for getting to know what for folks come here."

Just then another voice made itself heard. It sounded as if at a distance. It seemed to turn a corner, and then come along the passage. It gradually became more distinct as it said,—

"Come, Jane, for what in the world art thou keeping up this brawl? Open the door, and don't rouse up all M——."

The chain fell with a chink, and the door opened. There stood Mr. Errton and his masculine sister.

"Come in, Squire Sykes," he said, with rather a bluff manner. "Thou'rt a late visitor. Not the less welcome though on that account."

"Well, Mr. Errton, it's better—"

"Ah, thou'rt going to use the old proverb, Better late than never. Thou'lt hardly be disposed to quote it when thou'rt expecting to be hung, wilt thou? See, walk in here."

Mr. Errton, who had preceded Simeon along the passage with his hands in the pockets of a long, loose coat, and his feet in slippers trodden down at the heels, now pointed to the open door of a small room, which they both entered.

"Proverbs," he went on, as he placed chairs on each side the fire, "require to be used with considerable discretion, Squire Sykes. It's generally thought, isn't it, that the little wisdom the world ever had, has got, by some means, into its proverbs? It must be a small sort of wisdom, or it must have a most enviable knack of concealing itself; for I've never seen it in any proverbs that have condescended to cross my path. Be seated, Squire Sykes."

"Don't call me Squire Sykes, Mr. Errton. I don't like it. It's scorn and nothing else."

"Don't like it! Why how proud thou'rt getting! Is it to be sir, then? Sir Sykes."

"No, my name is Simeon, as you know well enough."

"Oh yes, to be sure," Mr. Errton observed, as he lifted his feet on to the hob. "Let's see, that's a Latin name isn't it? Has old Morgan taught thee how to decline it? Simeon—Levi—Judah—Issachar—Zebulun—Joseph—Benjamin—Dan—and something else. I forget the other cases. If ever I'm worth a son, squire, I'll call him Issachar, for he'll be sure to be a physachar. How is thy mother now?"

"Mother is very well, and much you care for her. Come, Mr. Errton, I want to pay some interest and be off."

"Pay some interest, dost thou?" Mr. Errton here spoke in a high key. "Well, it's always welcome thou sees, but never be thou in hot haste to pay. There's generally enough heat on the other side to secure the thing's being attended to. Let's not have any unnecessary zeal. How is thy uncle?"

"Pretty middling, I think," Simeon replied, with evident ill-humour.

"Lives rather too long for thy taste, doesn't he? Thou'rt not going to have that Farmstead yet, I tell thee. And how is thy Aunt Lee?—And Luther too, of Reformation memory?—And the sages at the school?—And thy sister, squire?—Pray how are they all?"

He shouted these questions into Simeon's ear, seizing him at the same time by one arm, and behaving in a way that quite frightened the young man. "Bob and Hildy go together!—They're to be married in a week!—In one short week welded into one!—Hurra, squire!—Famous rejoicings!—Socrates and Plato, and Jacob and Tom Paine, and a whole host of other Bible worthies to breakfast!"

Simeon stared in perfect bewilderment. He could only ejaculate, "Nay, never!"

"In a week, squire, in a week!" He went on poking the fire with great energy. "Thou sees I know all!—all! Come, what wilt thou take? Dost hear me?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," Simeon answered, giving a slight start, like one who had lost and was just recovering consciousness.

"Nothing? nonsense! Don't be so rude as to be unsocial. Let's see daylight in. It's uncomfortable going home in the dark." He rang the bell, which brought Miss Errton.

"Glasses, Jane, and hot water."

"Not at half-past eleven o'clock, Hand. It's time this young man were off home."

"Get out then, if that's thy humour," was his reply. "She's the most uncertain creature, squire, that I have to do with. There's no calculating her moods. I say," and he put his mouth close to Simeon's ear, so close that the latter found it difficult to pick out his words from the general clatter of hisses, and make sense of them. What he did get hold of amounted to this :—"Never have a sister with thee, Squire Sykes, when thou'rt lord of the Farmstead. There's no reckoning upon them. But watch me, and take a hint."

He took the key from his desk, unlocked a small cupboard, and brought from it a bottle of brandy and two glasses.

"See here! I'm up to her. Now, as we've no water, we'll just have this pure as it springs. Take that glass; now hold it. Poh! thy stopping. I'll not stop till it's full; and don't thee take wind when thou puts it to thy lips till it's empty. See! here's an example."

He half filled his glass, and gulped it down at once.

"Now, squire, we'll be friendly for a bit, waiving interest and everything else, and just chat. Thou'rt going to be a great man, I hear."

Simeon stared at him with perfect vacancy.

"Ay, ay, I know it," he continued. "Needn't think to gain a first-rate position without folks talking of it. Thou'rt to be head partner in this new concern we're to have down here."

Simeon blushed, and said Mr. Errton knew better than that. No, he didn't, nor did he wish to know better. He thought Simeon just the man for trade. "And let me say to thee, Squire Sykes, that I'm glad there's going to be this magnificent affair. It'll give employment to the neighbourhood.

And in more ways than one. How will those strikemen take it, dost think? Rather incline to suppose, if may suppose, in a matter that doesn't belong to me, without paying duty, that they'll bother a bit, and may be, try to balk you. But you must shoot a few of 'em, and the others will away like scared crows."

"I've nothing to do with it, Mr. Errton."

"How's that?"

"Don't know, but so it is."

"Dear me, squire, that's strange. But thou'lt astonish them all yet. Sup, man—sup, and don't stare so! Now I'm thinking, squire," he went on, changing the relative position of his feet on the hob, by bringing the undermost uppermost, and putting that which was uppermost into the place thus vacated, and folding his arms:—"I'm thinking, squire, it'll be ugly in the strikemen balking thy Uncle and Co., seeing he makes such a pet of 'em."

"He makes sadly too great a pet of 'em, Mr. Errton. He's now fretting himself about their neglect of the Sabbath. He fears they'll lose it in the end."

"Indeed! And who'll run away with it does he think, squire? Nobody'll be very ready to bear off such a nuisance, I fancy. However, that apart, he's a fool for making it a trouble. See the difference in men, squire. When I see that footpath"—pointing with his thumb over the left shoulder—"crowded on a Sunday morning, with dirty, lazy fellows, and the road down yonder thronged with carts and wagons, all off for pleasure, I just shave away, and say to myself, All right, my men! You carry this game on a little longer, and become in your self-willedness a little stronger, and we'll see what comes next! Just knock this little bit of superstition about Sunday on the head, and we're on the heels of a change. We'll just turn you into our factories and workshops to spend the day. It'll do you more good than rambling and quarrelling on the roads, besides saving your pockets and poking a bit of fun at our parsons. Seven days' work for six days' wages will bring down prices, and make it easier competing with those countries that don't trouble themselves with Sundays. You'll

not then appear so jolly, whilst I'm so miserable ; for I do declare those Sundays are my dullest days."

"But they'd resist that. They'd fight for Sunday."

"What for would they fight for it? What good does it do 'em? I'll be bound it's the most expensive and hardest day they have. It would be a kindness to 'em to snuff it quite out. And it would be snuffed out if it weren't for those white-necked praters who turn out in such abundance on those days. The working men have them to thank, and nobody else, for their weekly holiday. They haven't themselves to thank, I'm sure ; nor Parliament ; nor the press ; nor us, squire. If it rested with any of those to hold it, they'd be sure to let it slip, and it would be clean gone for ever. But those strong-gripped parsons hold on tremendously ; and hold on amidst the jeers and laughter of the very fools who ought to be most thankful to them. As soon as they let go, Sunday winks out. It can't be kept up as a mere holiday. The thing will be wholly impracticable. If people were to use it for what it was once used for, why then there wouldn't be much risk of its being tampered with. But they're using it for other purposes ; and hence if the pulpit would only hold its jabber, the thing would go clean out. I'm a bad fellow, I suppose, Sykes—at any rate my sister is of that opinion—but I, for one now, wouldn't consent to touch this Sunday if I clearly saw folks wanted it for the purpose of attending to what they call better things. I trust I'm not a heathen. I always feel a little sheepish when I see a decent, pious man. I say to myself, 'Well, Hand, after all, thou must either come to this, or to something worse.' And in a general way this is the case with others. But hang it if I'd submit, if the law didn't make me, to stop a day in every seven, merely to give fools an opportunity to be greater fools! The working classes may hold Sunday if they'll respect it. But if they make it a day of mere pleasure, they'll lose it. The lowering of public opinion will lead to a relaxation of the law, and then the thing's done. They're then tied down to work the year through, and will be right served. But this is no business of mine. It belongs to thy Uncle Sykes. I was asking thee if thou didn't think they'd bother him in this other matter."



"Yes, I do. I expect trouble; but he doesn't. He thinks it'll turn out something in their way; but they don't believe it, and will be sure to try their hand at thwarting him."

"Right, squire, quite right! Here's to thy health. I'll have thee nominated for the West Riding, that I will."

Then having put down his glass and smacked his lips, he went on,—

"I shall do for another half-hour now. And so thou thinks they'll thwart him? Right, squire, quite fight! And so"—

As he commenced this sentence, he brought his feet from the hob, and planted them firmly on the hearth, looking thoughtfully at the fire. He then suddenly shoved his chair near to Simeon, planted a hand on each knee, lowered a little his head and shoulders as if making a leap-frog back for his desk, and fixed his eyes steadfastly on the young man's face.

"And so thou thinks they'll do that? Right—I see—I read thy meaning. Needn't say more. Thou thinks—means—that they'll be holding a hole and corner meeting soon; that some one will say, Get rid of the leader; oh, rascals that they are! That some one will whisper to somebody, Here's a handsome reward if you'll do it; that then a piece of lead will be popped into a —," and he thrust the forefinger of his right hand into his left, which he had made into a socket, by way of supplying the hiatus; "that it will be cocked at some one; that it will go straight to its mark, though in the dark; that somebody will roll over; that the coroner will be sent for; that the news of murder will fly, and search be in vain; that the new mill will go to the winds, and the patriot-murderer to America, and that the whole thing will soon be forgotten. I see it all, squire! I catch thy meaning. It beams from thy sweating face. Thou'rt sly, oh sly! but dangerous. They'd better make their wills, and take leave of their friends, that resolve to trifle with thee. Well, so be it, lad, and the fates help thee!"

"Keep hands off, Mr. Errton," Simeon suddenly exclaimed, rubbing his thighs as if they had been just nettled, and pushing back his chair as if afraid of being swallowed. The reason was, that that gentleman had gradually lessened the distance between

them as he spoke, and, as he approached the end of his hurried sentences, had placed a hand on each of the young man's knees, making him feel this by a squeeze, simultaneously with his mention of the help of the fates.

"What afraid of? I'm not a leper!"

"Nor am I a murderer, Mr. Errton."

"Who said thou wast? I don't know though. I'm feeling very queer."

Simeon observed, as he said so, that his cheek was growing pale, and that a death-like hue was creeping over his face.

"I must leave thee for a minute," he muttered, and made his way with difficulty out of the room. Simeon began to suspect foul play; some scheme to fasten upon him the imputation of a dark deed. Hence his mind was relieved when he heard Mr. Errton vomiting violently, and his sister scolding him for making so free with the bottle. His mind was relieved, and, at the same time, stirred. A thought entered it, a moving thought, and it filled with excitement, as a populous city does on the arrival of its sovereign. The excitement was proclaimed by rolling eyes and a restless manner. The eyes turned to the desk, and thence to the small bunch of keys dangling from the cupboard door. A voice from within spoke; an evil voice and at an evil hour. It spoke of something only requiring a minute, and urged immediate action. Some key and packet were both well known, it added. There *was* immediate action. He rose; stepped lightly to the door; peeped cautiously through the small space left by its not being quite closed; and then, on tiptoe, strode back to the keys. Instantly, and without a gingling note, one of them was in the key-hole of the desk. But it wouldn't turn. Quick as thought, another was tried. There was a slight cough, and the lid of the desk rose. A hand was at once on a small packet of papers, and in almost no time, an eye was scanning it at one end, which a couple of expert fingers had opened. No, that wasn't the one. Another was drawn, and similarly scrutinised. No. Another. Yes, that was it. One paper was pulled out with nervous fingers. It fell, in the hurry, on a letter, which apparently had been thrown into the desk. The letter, in consequence of some-

thing about it, attracted attention, was hastily glanced at, eagerly snatched up, and then crumpled, with the other, into a waistcoat pocket. In a second, the keys were hanging in their place, dumb and safe accomplices in crime, and Simeon Sykes was in his chair. A minute passed, a long minute, during which nothing was to be heard but the severe retching of Mr. Errton, which Simeon wished might rend the manufacturer in twain, when the voice again spoke. It urged flight, immediate flight. It was backed by Miss Errton, who soon after entered the room. Her brother was ill, and Simeon had best go, and not come next time at such an unlikely hour.

Gladly he obeyed, unspeakably delighted with a sight he caught of the tyrant straining and sweating, as if a legion of demons had entered his body to vex and torment him. Out he went into the darkness, without fear, or even thought of aught, excepting what he had done and seen that night, under the roof he was quitting. The old cloak and grey hat halted not, until the feet that carried them felt the firm road on which Nelson, the wagoner, performed his feats at transit. No Nelson was near, however. Had it been so, he would have seen a stooping figure beside a heap of stones, and now and then a shooting spark. Listening, he would have heard a sharp, short click, click, click. He would have seen a face, slightly reddened, as if with something on fire, and a match probing the tinder-bowels of a round, little box, for the favour of ignition. Looking again, he would have beheld a light, flickering in the feeble night-breeze, and a written paper held closely to it. He would have seen two eyes gazing intently at it, and the next minute the blaze applied to its lower edge; and it would have occurred to him that the face smiled with malignant glee, as the curling flames wrapped it round and leaped up, as if in triumph, just before passing into darkness and destruction. And had he looked a little narrowly, he would have seen that the destroyer was scrupulously careful to do his work most thoroughly, and not to leave an atom of the paper unconsumed, nor a step in the transaction unobserved, even to the winking out of the flying sparks that chased one another through the quivering ashes, as in frantic search of letters

and meanings for ever obliterated. Listening attentively he would have heard a voice say, as if addressing the dry dust of Mr. Errton:—

“There! thy power for mischief is broken. Thou wilt no more testify to my folly, nor preach to me of danger. With thee die both interest and principal. I have run a great risk, but performed a great work; and would now give thanks to my uncle’s God, only my obligations are to another, a much-abused, personage.”

Something else he said, as he blew out the light, which had reference to other papers. These he should not destroy, but take them down with him to Oatlands, if Nelson would be kind enough to give him the benefit of a berth.

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## CHAPTER XV.

## A STORMY NIGHT.

MR. SYKES, of the Farmstead, was fond of a little congenial society, so he would have a small party. He would have Bower and Bray, of course ; also, his niece and nephew. And he had asked his friend Abel Morgan, he told his sister, and Mr. Ben Sparks.

"And now," he went on, "I should like to ask the young folks from the school-house. What say you, Martha—are you willing?"

"I fear it would draw down remark."

"Oh, I don't care for that. Let them come down thick as hailstones. What I wish to ascertain is your own feeling in regard to the matter, seeing that you'll have to manage."

"If you do that, you should ask Simeon."

"What's the use? He's not at home, and hasn't been for three days."

"Well, Dinah will grumble."

"She'd grumble all the same if I did. I've never a friend but she's reckoning up what it costs. I've heard of her saying, that according to her counting, I've spent as much in deserts as would have built a cottage. She looks upon me as spending the children's money. It's a little too bad to lay claim to my property in that way, and so deny to me the liberty of using it as I may think. If a man wishes to be watched and judged, and have all his doings weighed and chronicled, he's only to surround himself with a few expecting relations. They'll be sure to do it, and make him miserable. If the law would allow of it, some folks would pension off their richer kin on a pauper's pittance, and appropriate all his property before his eyes. No doubt of it."

"Well, do as you like. It would please Luther and Hilda."

"You see, Martha, they're as good as in the family, and what end will be gained by fighting shy of 'em?"

"So be it, so be it."

And so it was. It was a stormy evening though. It had been stormy for two days. It appeared as if the elements most decidedly disapproved of Mr. Sykes's small party. The furious wind blew hard at those who had to travel westward in making for the Farmstead. It drove with tremendous fury at the Morgans, as much as to say, Back, back, back! each gust being wilder and madder than its predecessor, as if their perseverance excited its fiercest wrath. Thick, black clouds, rolled across the lowering sky, in such numbers and with such rapidity, that when Lucy turned round to take breath, it seemed to her a marvel whence they came and whither they went. The threatening rain hadn't begun to fall, yet the channels from the hills and through the valleys were swollen with foaming, tumbling torrents, the result of the thaw brought by the change in the wind. In the brief lulls that now and then occurred, those torrents were to be heard in the distance, tearing away with a hoarse roar towards the ocean, impatient to get back to their home, now that they were set at liberty by a merciful wester, and allowed to leave the scenes of their long exile on bleak moors and barren heights. Yet this unfavourable state of things didn't keep any of Mr. Sykes's invited friends away. All came, and, with one exception, brought with them their best tempers.

All went on pretty agreeably, until a slight interruption had the presumption to make itself heard at the door. It was about seven o'clock. The wind hadn't at the time abated in the least its fury. It was driving at the door, rattling the shutters, threatening the chimneys, and making the whole house quiver again, as if commissioned by Dinah Sykes to hurl it down in one mighty crash upon the heads of the vile revelers who were devouring with cursed greediness what, in her opinion, belonged to her son Simeon. Half a dozen voices were in full clatter at the moment. Loudest amongst them was Mr. Sparks's, who was earnestly endeavouring to prove to

Luther something he himself didn't believe. Mr. Bray was sustaining a part in the general chorus. He was well nigh captivated with his listener, Lucy Morgan, who, with her sweetest smile and an expression of the deepest interest, was lending him all her attention. The bird's-eye seemed somehow strangely fascinated with the old school-master's daughter, insomuch that Luther, casting now and then a glance toward them, became oblivious at times of Mr. Sparks's eloquent sophistry, and inclined to be a little jealous of the junior partner. Messrs. Sykes and Bower, with commendable seriousness, were trying to comprehend some pneumatic principles which Abel Morgan was laying down. The subject had arisen out of the storm raging without; or rather, it had been blown to them by the wind. Robert Morgan and Mrs. Lee were seated at the table, amusing themselves with a descriptive atlas. The latter found her young friend well up in geography, and a very pleasing companion with such an account of the world before them. Hilda was silent, and, in a way, alone. She was near to her uncle's chair, but sat with compressed lip and dejected air, her eyes turning repeatedly to the carpet, and her hand shading cautiously her face. She looked fixedly at Robert for the first time that evening, when the servant, in obedience to the interruption already alluded to, appeared, and announced that he was wanted. With steady gaze she followed him to the door, and when it closed, Lucy Morgan noted that she heaved a slight sigh, and turned her attention again, as in pensive thought, to the figures at her feet. He was requested to go into the kitchen. He there found a rough, weather-beaten wagoner, with a whip so tall that it couldn't stand erect in the space between the boards overhead and the floor.

"What! Nelson!"

"I believe it is, young man. Excuse me for calling you away from your supper."

"Oh, don't say a word, Nelson. I mean about that, but be sure I'm glad to see you. We some way have got friends since that night, Nelson."

"You couldn't send them lasses out for a minute, could you?" he asked, with his lips close to the young man's ear, "*for an ounce of tobacco, or anything.*"

"You mean the servants?" he asked slyly.

"Yes," Nelson replied, with a nod, stretching out his left hand and running his fingers down the lash of his long rod, as if preparing to whip them out, in case they refused to obey the order of Robert Morgan.

"Oh, no need to resort to that expedient, if you wish to speak to me alone. Jane, just show us into the small room a minute. Mr. Sykes will excuse, I know."

"Yes, yes, that will do," he observed approvingly, as they followed.

When the girl had left them, and Robert Morgan had closed the door, he resumed thus:—

"Well, Nelson, is it on that unpleasant business you have come? Just let me put down your whip. I'm afraid of that inkstand."

"Yes, it is; and it's no child's business ayther. They come to-night, young man. To-night, except it turn aht vary fine. I got it not twenty hours ago. It's the wild weather that's causing 'em to try soiner nur they thowht on. What did you call this room—small one?"

"Yes."

"I heerd it mentioned. And that desk, too."

"What are they wanting, Nelson?"

"Don't know exactly. But depend on't it's mischief they're up to. And my word for yours, that nevy of this man's is in at it."

"Shouldn't at all wonder. Now, Nelson, I'm going to be plain with you. Look at me. Is it so really? Aren't you hoaxing me? Now, say out."

"Hoaxing ye! I'd be sorry to leave my team away yonder to hoax ayther ye or ony one else, sich a night as this. Hoaxing! a pretty piece of business that for me! If I'm dahted, let me aht, and tak' t' consequences."

Nelson was disposed to be quite wroth. So his listener, seeing it, observed,—

"Now, Nelson, no offence. I merely wished to see if you were really earnest. I see you are. I must call Mr. Sykes. You don't object? Very well; wait a minute. I'll be back again, and you shan't regret having come all this way."



Mr. Sykes was called into the passage. Robert apprised him in few words of what was in the wind. He seemed stunned. He would interrogate Nelson himself. The man's statement was straightforward enough. It was very strange. He wished Robert to call his father. Abel came, and advised that they should call Mr. Bower. Mr. Bower suggested they'd best have Mr. Bray. Mr. Bray would like to have the opinion of Mr. Sparks; so as the room was small, and as the wagoner, with his outstretched legs and arms, appeared wholly unconscious of that fact, Mr. Sykes suggested that they should repair to the room they'd left, and request their female friends to be kind enough to withdraw.

All, with the exception of Mr. Sparks, were disposed to look at the matter seriously. A strong feeling, they had found out, existed against their scheme. It was just possible that some sort of violence was to be attempted with a view to the frustration of their plan. Mr. Sykes didn't believe that the weavers in M——, left to themselves, would offer the least opposition; but, incited by those strike-agitators, they might be stirred up to do such a thing. Mr. Sparks declared it all humbug. For such reports he'd begun latterly to entertain supreme contempt. The working classes in that part, had neither the genius to devise, nor the pluck to carry out, any plan of opposition. They were a lot of "whining, canting, ungrateful, envious, mean-spirited dogs. They're never right. Always wanting petting, and helping, and humouring, like spoiled children. I shall never fear them, nor would I try to please them, Sykes, as you do. And as to the matter before you, with all due deference to the opinions and advice that have been offered, I would say, just sit here quietly until morning, and if nobody comes, break that old stable's whip on his head, and send him about his own business, if he has any."

"It'll tak' a stronger arm nur thine, young man, to do that," Nelson replied, colouring very much.

"May be it would, man; but seeing that the good services of sinewy arms are procurable for money, there's nothing impracticable about it."

"Come, Nelson," Mr. Sykes interposed, "don't be offended.

We are much obliged to you, and not at all disposed to adopt such a suggestion as that. You mustn't mind that young gentleman. He's given to joke."

"May be," the wagoner replied, "he'll some time joke once too often, forgetting that he's under a friend's roof."

"Then up and at him, old fellow, if he does," Benjamin Sparks carelessly answered.

It was at length resolved that the ladies should be quietly escorted to Mrs. Lee's; that the gentlemen should remain all night with Mr. Sykes; and that their watching at the Farmstead, in case no attempt was made upon the house, should be kept a perfect secret, as otherwise, in Luther's opinion, they would get heartily laughed at for their credulity. Benjamin Sparks laughed already. It was all perfectly ridiculous. Who would, who durst, lift up a finger to thwart such a company? You are a sceptical sort of man, Mr. Benjamin. Being a hot spark from an aristocratic flame, you are apt to regard those plebeian dogs with scorn. They are nothing of course. Not worth either courting or cursing. They haven't even the genius for mischief. They can't organise anything. Not they indeed!

Mr. Sparks, will you come with us for an hour, whilst Messrs. Sykes, Bower, & Co., watch at the Farmstead? It is dark and stormy, but a man of your calibre won't care for that. Surely, if men of low birth venture abroad such a night, you won't give back; and that they dare and do, we have had proof in the departure of that old wagoner. See, this way. It's a steep hill, and this is a rugged path, but perseverance will soon bring us to the top. We'll turn in here, sir, if you please. Have a care, the door is rickety and the doorway low, and unless you stoop, ill luck may befall you. There! now lift up your head. This is a rat-hole, isn't it? They must have an enviable tenacity of life that manage to vegetate here, mustn't they? That is a turf-fire. And, sure enough, that form asleep there beside it, with head leaning against the wall, is Simeon Sykes, of whom you've already heard something. That thing in the corner is a loom; and the name of the person weaving, is Leechy Luty. He appears an ancient, sleepy,

mindless sort of creature, doesn't he? Just the man to let you tread him in the dust? Who need fear a hundred such men, with your eye and Nelson's whip? They're cowed by a look. Oh yes! But you have a care. Are you quite sure that under that rustic rind and sheepish meekness, there is not another nature?—another man? Verily there is. Don't you suppose you know a man like that, when you have just seen him once; for you don't. That man has parts and powers that such as you never see; parts and powers, potent for good or evil, according to their bent. Hence the fatal mistakes into which you fall with his class. You just get a surface knowledge of them. You see nothing but dulness and sheepishness, it may be; so you slight them, not knowing that all the while they think much and feel acutely, and that every insult adds to an indignation hot as fire, and fraught with the mischief of a sleeping volcano. That man can speak another language besides his broad, and to you, almost unintelligible Yorkshire. And other thoughts occupy his mind, besides his daily work and meal. And he's not always, in expression of countenance, what you now see him. He has a mission, viz., revenge. He deems himself an injured and insulted man, and, whilst he does not hope to receive his due, he has resolved to have his revenge. You and your class he dislikes. He knows that you kick such as he in your heart; and hence he curses your strutting frame, and denies, with clenched teeth, your right to the wealth upon which you plume yourselves; and gives himself, moreover, with heart and soul, to any movement likely to humble your pride, and bring you to feel that he is somebody and has a right to something.

But see! there is an old door here. Let us push it back and peep in. There is a room here; a room containing company, for hot air and the low murmur of voices meet us. Ay, company and no mistake! But what is their business? What are they doing? Oh, mere child's play, no doubt! for they're working men. That's money on that table, and gold too! But what is that man about on the floor? Something that interests them; for they bend eagerly over him. Let us see, Mr. Sparks. You peep over that shoulder, and we'll just glance

over this. He's chalking something on the smooth flag. Why, its in shape like unto a musket, and that beside it resembles a spike. They look at them for a minute.

"He'll supply those at ——," says the man with the chalk. "They've just got four hundred of them to Bradford. Those spikes, old —— will make at —— a dozen. We can't do better than give an order at once."

They unbend their backs, you observe, Mr. Sparks, and signify their approval of that suggestion, as the man with the chalk rises, and dashes the dust from his knees. Ah, we can tell you the meaning of this. It's not what we brought you up here to behold though. It has to do with a wide-spread political conspiracy. An Irish agitator, of the name of O'Connor, is very busy just now. He and his party are attempting to effect some very extensive changes in the state. Moral force they believe inadequate to the bringing of them into existence; so they advise the people to purchase arms, and show fight. This is a secret meeting of the heads of the movement in and about M——. The movement gets on wonderfully; that is, amongst the working classes. Reduction of wages, tyranny of factory-masters, working of the New Poor Law, indifference of the clergy to everything affecting the working man, help it on amazingly. They're becoming quite desperate. They talk of arming and fighting in the most open manner. They meet in companies, for exercise, in fields and on moors, officered by men who have served in the army. They talk, as you may hear them now, in the coolest manner, of cutting off the higher and middle classes, if they should show the least resistance to the triumph and despotism of the masses. Those men have some idea of filling the highest posts in government. There are forty thousand operatives just now, in connection with the movement, who don't doubt that they will become, ought to become, Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is certainly ridiculous, we know, Mr. Sparks. But not a tithe more absurd than a hundred thousand fictions now floating in the heads of the men engaged in this mad movement. Ah, these men! What maniacs ye must be, ye victims of those crafty agitators, to suppose that all your wild

schemes can be carried out, and your boundless ambition gratified. Ye have wrongs that should be instantly redressed, and rights that ought to be conceded; but is it consistent to redress wrong by inflicting wrong? to seek to obtain rights by recklessly sacrificing rights? In regard to many of your complaints, we say, true, true! In regard to your mode of redress, out upon it, say we! But the men are leaving, Mr. Sparks, so we'll let them alone for the present. Some time—say a few years hence—we may try our hand at sketching the origin and conduct of this movement.

Simultaneously with their departure, Luty steps from his "sitting-tree," and gives rest to his "slay-boards." He asks Sim what the men have been saying to him. Sim carelessly replies, when he just touches the red turf with a small bar of rusty iron. A hundred sparks, like scared fire-gnats, leap out of the grate and away up the chimney into the roaring wind, as if obeying some peremptory behest of Leechy's. May be they are. Like enough they are intended to indicate that the way is clear to some one. Not at all improbable, for see! the door opens, and with a strong blast of wind, two men enter. One of them speaks.

"Upon my word, Lute, your signals have made scant show to-night. They were soon whirled out. It blows tremendously, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Luty replies, looking at the fire. He pokes it with the old rusty bar.

"I say," the man instantly observes, like one ill at ease, "what are you about? Not signalling a force up here, are you, to take us?"

"Wait and see," Luty coolly answers. The man turns his back to the fire, and looks around. Then he speaks,—

"Been many in that hole to-night?"

"No."

"How soon is Lord John to swing? By-the-by, they'll have to pay him the compliment we pay cats in such circumstances. His own weight won't strangle him: he's too light. Dear me, how it does blow! I think there's a 'rumpus' below stairs to-night. The — has got serious business on hand, as Bobby says."

Another voice speaks, and a hand pulls Simeon's hat playfully from his head. Simeon surlily commands it to cease its bother. It says,—

"Come, old chap, cheer up. It's neck or heels this go. It's not neck *and* heels. I use a disjunctive, as my rival would call it. Neck *or* heels; for if you don't fly by the latter, you may have to swing by the former."

"Curse your flying, Blamins," the former voice observes; "who need to fly by their heels when we've got the flying machine at the bottom of the hill?"

You note, Mr. Sparks, that he inclines his head towards Luty, and lowers his voice. Listen to him.

"This is a capital night, Lute. If all's quiet about, yon old pliers says we go clean in at once. But before we go, Lute, a word respecting the pay. Have you got it?"

"Yes. At any rate, it will be ready when the job is done."

"Let's see it, old chap."

"And then you'll knock me on the head, and be off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That's that Simeon, Mr. Sparks. What an awful laugh! What wild, reckless despair there is in it! Luty goes on without noticing it.

"You gut the desk, and bring the contents here, and you'll get the money."

"Just so. No more about that, except just this: if you're hoaxing us, you've seen the sun for the last time. How goes the time, Blamins?"

"A quarter to twelve."

"It's slow," the first speaker remarks, and strides to the small window.

You'll observe, Mr. Sparks, that he appears rather fidgetty. He comes back, and pulls something from a breast-pocket. Two loaded pistols! Let's hear what he's saying.

"See, Lute. They get what's in here, that try to stop me. Let me give you a word of advice, which I received from yon old Skeleton-keys. Never throw yourself into the way of a burglar. Many fools do so. It's courting a worse fate than being plundered. The true sort, he says, never attempt a

house without reckoning up the force that's in it, and preparing to meet it. And never you sleep with your bed-room door open or unfastened, when you live in style. It's very foolish. A burglar has only to walk in and despatch you when you are asleep."

He appears to talk just to keep himself company, doesn't he? Certainly, neither Luty nor Simeon takes much notice. Poor, unhappy Simeon! The word burglar set him a-thinking. A burglar! he said to himself. He felt that he was getting lower and lower. That Hilda and he were getting farther and farther apart. He then felt, for the first time, that home was no more his home. That he must fly—fly, he knew not whither. Oh, what would he not then have done and given to be what he had once been! The happy child bouncing on the hearth! The merry youth whistling at the plough! Oh, how he wished that he were Robert, Luther, any one, rather than his hated self! Remorse began that moment to gnaw. As he gazed into the fire, he felt a tear in his eye, and a sense of suffocation. He started to his feet, but recollecting his position, how that there was danger in any attempt at flight, he tried to walk off his agitation by pacing the small room.

Time moves heavily, Mr. Sparks. It is now half-past twelve, but no abatement in the fury of the storm. How it roars and rumbles! It may be heard with horrid distinctness; for all here, with the exception of Simeon, are quite still, being occupied, apparently, with their own thoughts. On, on, come the blasts. Hush, Simeon! There was a whistle in that lull. Hold until that blast is over. Hark! it's there again. Blamins hears it, and speaks softly.

"Bland! Bland!" It is nearly dark, the dull fire only serving just to bring into view the forms that surround it.

"Yes, I hear," Bland replies. "I believe I've been asleep, for I was at sea just as you spoke. It blows hard. Sykes! ready?" "Yes."

"Leave quietly. Tread like mice. Sykes! don't be in such a fuss. If you don't behave to-night, I'll shoot you in an instant. None of your bungling now. Whew-whew-whew! See! he's there. Jack?"

Something black approaches them, which appears to keep its feet with difficulty in the strong wind. It says,—

"Come, what are you about? You'll have the sun up afore you're off. Is that Sykes here?"

"All right, Jack. Where's the fly? Let's in and off."

There is pluck here at any rate, Mr. Sparks.

At the time it was half-past twelve on the Roughts, it was half after twelve at the Farmstead. But wearily the time had passed with its inmates. All is darkness in the house. In the room are three gentlemen, and aloft are three watchers. Looking down upon the approach to the front, are Robert Morgan and Mr. Bray. Luther is doing duty at the back. The plan of action is all settled.

"Dear, it's cold up here, Mr. Bray. Are you feeling again?"

"Yes. It is now a quarter to one, I think. You feel. They'll come within the next hour, if they come to-night. It isn't very dark now, or we can see better than we could."

"If they don't come, Mr. Sparks will fire into us, you may depend upon that."

They are silent again, for they have tired themselves with whispering about different topics. It is one o'clock. A quarter past. Half-past. The hurricane doesn't abate. The clouds fly and the trees bend before it.

"Bray!" Robert calls in a whisper.

"Yes, I'm looking," is the reply. "I see it. You mean that black object that is moving on the road there?"

"Ay. What is it?"

"I can't imagine. Stay. It's stopped, hasn't it? That means something, Morgan."

They see men get out. One, two, three, four.

"They're here, Mr. Bray."

"Now be still, Morgan. Keep silent. Don't breathe more than's absolutely necessary. How you tremble! They're consulting. I can see three of 'em distinctly. I wish the wind would blow away that bush. It breaks the view. Halloo! one of 'em points this way. Did you see him?"

"Yes. I—"

"Hush, Morgan! You are in too great a flutter to talk. See! there's a move! They're coming. Cannot you see?"



"I can—"

"Now, be still and silent. If they're good hands, they'll be in in ten minutes. Oh dear me! I hope they won't stir down in the room. Do you think they'll watch well?"

"There's a seam in the shutter of their room, and they were to take it in turn. They'll be sure—"

"Now let's hush, Morgan, and watch like cats."

Three of the men enter the garden. They approach as cautiously and as steadily as the wind will allow, thrusting aside with their hands such boughs and branches as happen to be in their way. One of the men has a grey hat on, which Robert Morgan has seen before. It attracts his attention. He looks more carefully. Mr. Bray can hear the young man's heart beat. He sees Simeon Sykes at his uncle's door, in the character of a burglar, and it may be, with intent to commit murder! He speaks to the men. One of them puts a hand into his pocket, and moves toward the door. They can see him kneel. He is boring. The other man and Simeon converse. Simeon appears very earnest, if one may judge from his gesturing. At length, the man gives him something, and motions him off. He takes his stand near to the room window, in which are his uncle and the other watchers. The man keeps guard at the door, where an entrance is being effected. Robert is thirsty with excitement. It's a moment of intense suspense. The least noise, and they're away. But inside there is no noise, if we except something like a mouse nibbling at a crust of bread, which those in the room have just caught during that brief pause in the roaring wind. It's no mouse, however, but a brace and bit nibbling at Mr. Sykes's front door. On, on, come the blasts with terrific fury! You were right in a sense, Mr. Bland. There must be mischief somewhere to-night. That is a thunderer which we hear in the distance. It rumbles like artillery. How it rushes on! With what a roar and a rattle! Lashing into fury mill-dams and reservoirs, spraying fields and houses, and shaking tall, stalwart oaks like mere reeds in its savage grasp. It's here. The house rocks like—

"Halloa! what's that, Bray?"

"A pistol, unless my ears deceive me. There's mischief,

Morgan. See! the grey hat is running. Some one is hit. What a moan! Let's down with all haste."

The house is aroused and instantly astir.

"Are you all right?" Mr. Bray anxiously inquires.

"All right!" Mr. Benjamin Sparks replies with his usual vivacity. "But very near being all wrong. Zounds! if I didn't jump two yards skyward. It was just at my elbow."

"Where was it aimed for, d'ye think?" Bray asks, rather inclined to laugh, now that they are found to be all right.

"In here, no doubt. Now I think of it, it's yon old wagoner who hoped to square scores with me. It's that and nothing else."

"Lanterns!" says Mr. Sykes, "and less nonsense. Some one is shot, and we must give succour."

"Succour! you just leave 'em to stiffen in the wind, Mr. Sykes, and the next time they come in, it will be with a limp."

"No one shall stiffen at my door, Mr. Sparks, if I can prevent it."

"But how if this firing be a mere *ruse*? It is possible, you know. This suggestion is worth a moment's consideration; for in that case, the head that first peeps out, runs a risk of being shot through."

Mr. Bower thinks there is something in this. It would be a capital mode of despatching Mr. Sykes. He blushes just when he has made the observation, for all eyes are upon him. He adds,—

"I don't mean that it is desirable to despatch our old friend Mr. Sykes. But that it's possible an enemy might adopt that plan."

"Oh, thank you," Benjamin Sparks observes. "It struck me as somewhat coolly put, friend Bower. Well, decide upon something, somebody, and let's not huddle around this lantern till morning. Shall we give chase?"

"There's nothing to chase, Mr. Sparks," Luther puts in. "Bray and I have been around. They're off."

"Capital. You're not without pluck."

Others are of the same opinion. It is resolved, now that they are off, to institute a search for the would-be burglars.

The door is examined. Ay, sure enough they've been here. The lantern reveals footprints. Horrible! there is blood. Blood on the walk and on the wall. Blood in large quantities. Nothing else, however. They cease their search until morning. A constable is employed, but to no purpose. There is one who possesses something very much like a clue; but he keeps it locked in his own breast. Robert Morgan, for prudential reasons, doesn't mention the fact of having seen the grey hat in the garden.

We may here state, what we afterwards heard on good authority, that a singularly shaped conveyance was seen that night on the road Nelson travelled. It was going at a rapid rate. It made scarcely any noise, just passing the individual who saw it, with a whir and a whiff. It was believed to be a resurrection cart. It could hardly be that, however. It must have been a hearse, rather; for a keeper saw something flung from it into a stream which it crossed below M——, that went down into the water with a splash. The following morning a body was found near the spot, entangled in some old roots, with a recent death-wound upon it. It was buried unidentified. Ah, Bland! It did blow that night. It *was* a suitable night for the purpose. Verily, there *was* mischief in the wind!

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## CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH SOMETHING MORE MAY BE LEARNED RESPECTING  
MR. ERETON.

It was Sunday evening; the first Sunday evening after the burglars' unsuccessful attempt upon the Farmstead. Leechy Luty was alone. Not merely alone, but in his own opinion, unobserved. To place this beyond doubt, he re-examined the temporary blinds he had that evening pinned up. All was right. Not just the thing, though, Mr. Luty. There is one corner of that little patched window which the scanty blind doesn't cover. And what is more unfortunate for you, is, that a keen, eager, glistening eye is at that corner. However, Leechy Luty wasn't aware of the fact at the time; hence, in his ignorance, he had no doubt that he was unobserved, just then, by mortal man at least. And, believing himself unobserved, he proceeded to do what he would by no means have done then, had he reckoned it possible that any one could be watching him. He raised one of the heavy flags of his floor on to one end; took a leathern bag out of the place thus uncovered; put the flag gently down again, and swept the disturbed dust and earth into the seams in such a way as to leave no trace whatever of the stone having been disturbed. He then reseated himself in front of his turf fire; spread an old apron over his knees; emptied the contents of the bag into it; and then returned them, by a very slow process, to the said bag. To the eye watching through the small opening left by the treacherous blind, the contents appeared to be money, and no doubt existed on the mind of the owner of the said eye, that Leechy Luty was counting it. That done, a long string was wound tightly round the neck of the bag or purse, and after being doubled up, by thrusting its head into its abdomen, it

was carefully lodged in one of his trousers' pockets. He next drew from another pocket a box, a smooth, iron box, of an oblong shape. He lifted up the lid, and turned the open side to the palm of his hand. He then counted nine somethings into it, pressed down the lid, and restored it to its former place. He then planted his left elbow on an arm of his crazy chair; placed the same side of his face against his open hand; fixed his dreamy eyes upon the turf fire; and heaved a heavy sigh. "More money!" the watcher involuntarily exclaimed, a strong impulse coming at the same moment upon him. It was a fearful moment to him. It was our mournful lot to hear him speak of it afterwards. He said:—

"That impulse I shall never forget. It came with all the fury of a demon. I didn't wish to entertain it. Not ten minutes before I had been vowing reformation. I had become sick of my way of life—of myself, in fact. I saw that a needful work was before me for which the remainder of life would be insufficient; the work of expiating my guilt and rising from my degradation. Hence I wrestled with the impulse, and reasoned with it, if such a dialogue as was then held may be called reasoning. A something said, 'Behold a way of escape! There is money there! With it you may fly! No one will see! Your arm is strong! He is alone! One shot, or if you're afraid of the report, a single blow, and he's despatched!' The strangest feeling was upon me. I was quite confused. The ground seemed to reel under my feet, and a mist to come over my sight. Involuntarily my hand was on a pistol I had, and I moved towards the door. But all at once, the heat, darkness, and bewilderment went away, and I somehow became fully conscious again of what and where I was. Another voice, a better counsellor, then spoke:—'Hold!' it said. 'What if thou shouldst be pursued—taken—hung! And even if thou shouldst not, wilt thou throw away for money, life, home, country, friends, and make thyself miserable, eternally miserable? Stay thy hand!' And I thank God I was able to stay my hand. I became cool, and the demon fled."

Leechy Luty heard a gentle tap at the door. He went to it and asked who was there.

"It's me, Luty," a voice replied. "Sim Sykes. Do open the door. I'm alone, and I believe ye are."

The door opened.

"What! Simeon?" the man said feelingly.

"Oh Luty!" he sobbed out. He placed himself down on an old stool, and covering his face with his hands, wept bitterly.

"I'm sorry," Luty observed, in a manner that was evidently intended to be consolatory, "to see thee in such trouble."

"Sorry ye may be, but surprised ye cannot be. Is it not to this that my ways have of late been tending, straight as an arrow? O Luty! what I have felt since I was last here, only God knows."

"I heard ye failed."

"Failed!" Simeon exclaimed, uncovering his face. "Don't talk about it. It drives me mad to think of that night."

"Thou was the first to allude to it, my young friend. Otherwise, I mightn't have touched upon it."

"Then curse me for it, and change the subject. I've come here for news and advice, Luty. Do ye hear if anything is said about me? And do ye think it would be safe for me to go right home and mend my ways? Do speak out, Luty."

"It's always safe to do the latter; how far, in thy case, it might be prudent to do the former, I can't say. I've heard thy running away spoken about, but nothing more."

"Is any one wanting to take me? Looking out for me? That's what I wish to know."

"Not as I know of. What has t' done?"

"That's all, Luty. Now, if I was sure I should be let alone, I'd go home and reform right and left. It's that cursed business I was drawn into last, that I fear will bring me trouble. Does any one suspect me, Luty?"

"That I can't say, Simeon. Last evening I had that school-master's son and Luther Lee up here, making particular inquiries about thee, and asking if I'd any company that night, and whom. Of course they went away as wise as they came."

"I'll tell ye one thing, Luty. Ye must have a care, or ye'll be in trouble. Ye're suspected, I'll tell ye."

"Suspected I may be, but convicted I'm not likely to be, I think."

"I say, Luty, to be plain now. Who offered the pay for that job? That ye *do* know. And I'll swear ye've the money upon ye just now."

Luty started and stared at Simeon. How did he know that? Very well. He didn't, and he'd better have a care what he said.

"Come, Luty, old friends may trade in secrets. Whether or not ye have it, I'll tell ye who was to pay it. Hand Errton! There now, deny that."

Luty turned pale as death.

"Simeon! whatever thou trades in, trade sparingly in such accusations as that. Otherwise thy life isn't worth a groat. If Errton heard that, he'd expose and ruin thee at once."

"How would he do it? Eh? Ha, ha, ha."

"Do it? Thou art mad. Hasn't he thee in a halter strong as the hangman's rope?"

"No. See! I care that," and he snapped his fingers. "The halter's slipped, Luty." This he said in a sort of under-tone, and with quite a chuckle. Luty was amazed. With a look of despair he observed,—

"Well, I don't understand it."

"And I don't care to enlighten ye. But about the pay, ye can't deny that; and if I'd that rascal here, I don't know that I wouldn't blow the contents of this into him, just before beginning to reform." He pulled out a loaded pistol, which Leechy Luty eyed with considerable concern.

"Come, come, Simeon," he said, "don't produce such things in conversation with me. We have no quarrel. I must go out. I've to go out this evening, Simeon." He rubbed his hands, shoved back his chair, and appeared the most fidgetty of men.

"I'm not going to hurt a hair of yer head, Luty. Not I, indeed. And may be I oughtn't to have said what I have just uttered. But I can't help boiling when I think soberly of that business. And that he should get it up, or offer an inducement to it. By the powers! what a trick for a brother *manufacturer* to do! I yet say he deserves shooting."

"Thou uses strong words, Simeon. But I must away. Will thou guard the hut until I return? I shall be glad."

Simeon looked round. He thought, I can sleep for an hour. But, if Luty should return with a force and take me? He'd give information for a pound, and then I'm sold. I'm held in another halter. So he said, after a moment's hesitation,—

"Thank ye, I'll not stay. I'll seek out fresh quarters."

"I say," Luty observed, when they had both risen, and he had put on his hat and taken down his stick. "What if Uncle Sykes offered this money, just to draw thee and others into a snare? Would thou shoot him?"

"Gammon!" said Simeon, as they turned out into the darkness. They parted; but it was not a separation properly speaking. Simeon resolved to watch the tenant of the Roughs that night, and so kept at a short distance from him. The way the observed took was well known to the observer. The former was an object of dangerous interest to the latter during the whole of that short journey. At one turn of the then deserted road, the former impulse came upon him with fearful force. It was with difficulty that he could restrain himself, as he thought of the leathern bag and small iron box. But he did restrain himself; yet it was not without regret, after all, as he saw Hand Errton's door open, and Leechy Luty enter. Luty was shown into the room in which Simeon had slipped the halter, by which Mr. Errton had supposed he held him. That gentleman was of course alone. On the desk were his ledgers, and beside his arm chair a couple of loaded muskets.

"Well, Lute, how art thou this evening?"

"Pretty well, ah thank you," he answered, as he dropped meekly into a chair to which the manufacturer had pointed.

"Ah, Lute! thou eyes the muskets, old rascal, I see. I may as well say to thee, therefore, that it's the times that renders such an act of precaution needful. It is a difficult thing, Lute, getting wages down to a paying point. It is a great pity masters ever introduced the custom of giving wages at all. We could have done very well without them. They are a nuisance, a perfect nuisance."



Luty shifted uneasily in his chair, but said nothing. He thought, however. Thought how that the custom of paying wages was rapidly verging toward extinction, so far as Mr. Errton was concerned. He wasn't allowed, however, to think a great deal; for Mr. Errton suddenly changed his manner, sitting down beside his friend, and plying him with questions about affairs and men, which neither of them had anything to do with. He pressed Luty to drink, but nearly in vain. Each seemed very shy of the bottle, as if conscious that he had a part to perform which would require a cool head and a steady hand.

"No—no—no, Mr. Errton. I've done. It's no use filling it, for I really can't take it. About this money. I've brought it back."

"Which? for I hope thou's two sums upon thee."

"The hundred first, if you please. I think you'll find it there." He placed a bag upon the small table between them.

"Ah!" Mr. Errton exclaimed, as he threw a side glance at it. "There in both quality and quantity, I hope, Lute." He turned to the table, and after carelessly unwinding the string, proceeded very leisurely to count and test the coin. "Thou sees, Lute," he went on, as he dropped from between his fingers a little pillar of sovereigns at a few inches distance from the open purse; "thou sees, Lute, it behoves one to be very particular at this day. Even one's nearest and dearest friends may come a little way short of the thing that's just right. However, I'm glad to see thou hasn't done so in this little bit of business. See! there's one for thyself." He threw a sovereign to Luty, who clutched it eagerly and seemed thankful for it. "Well, I must say, they made a bungling do of that job, Lute!"

"One of 'em managed to get shot, anyhow."

"Ay! that I heard. But how was it done, dost thou think? No shot was fired from within."

"Sometimes an officer falls by the hand of an enemy in his own company, Mr. Errton."

"I see, Lute. Pity but they'd all fallen by the hand of one another. But now that this business is over, Lute, let me

again press upon thee the importance of not saying a word about it to any one. If thou dost, within twelve hours thou'rt a dead man. I can blow thee up in an instant. I've mined thy hut on the Roughs, and laid a train underground all the way here. The end of it is just under one of those boards. I've only to wheel round in my chair any minute and apply a match, and thou'rt—I'd rather not say where—in no time. So have a care, Lute. Now about that other money. Have you got it?"

"I believe so. You'll find it in that tobacco-box."

"Just turn it out, Lute. I'd rather not finger that steel oyster." Luty turned out the contents of the box.

"Ay, they're there sure enough. Nine. She'd rather like to give you those for two fives. Were there two or three of you?"

"Two of us."

"What trash, Lute. They're not worth so many farthings. Ah, Dinah Sykes! have a care, and don't make so free with that 'Bank in the Balk.' Dost thou think the old pigsney would be ready to do more business on the same terms?"

"That she would. And she'd be able to do, for I know she's more."

"Lute! how thou does improve at talking. I can't understand this change. Art thou studying for some profession? I say, thou wouldst make a first-rate lawyer. Try for it, and by way of exercising thy wits preparatorily, help me in a little bit of a job. I want hold of Simeon Sykes. He's played me a trick. He came here the other night and stole a note—a note I held as security for some money he had borrowed. I prized that paper, for I know for a fact it contained forged signatures. With it I purposed some time humbling that proud fanatic at the Farmstead. I don't suppose we can get it back, but couldn't we get another by contriving a temptation?"

"Has he been in your desk?" Luty asked earnestly. For he saw at once how something else might be accounted for if he had.

"He hasn't been in himself, but he's had his hands in. And

I wished thee to get those of his mother, and come here this evening, that we might invent some plot. We must noose him by one means or another."

"But he's run away."

"Has he? He'll be back again though."

"Have you missed nothing else, Mr. Errton, beside the stamped note?"

"No. And I shouldn't have missed that, but the precise sum he owed me had escaped my memory, and I just looked out for it as a refresher. Why?"

"Only I suspect." Mr. Errton was amongst his papers instantly.

"By George! I can't tell what the impudent rogue has taken. But I miss a letter about a certain nameless matter. Well! That's a case!"

"Then he's got it, Mr. Errton." Here Mr. Errton let the lid of his desk fall with all its weight, and stood looking at Luty in mute astonishment. "I think so, because of what I've heard." Without opening his lips, he sat down and folded his arms.

"Well!" he exclaimed, after a minute's silence, "if I'm not in for it I don't know who is. Curse letter writing, and curse the hand that wrote that. I hope it'll wither away. What's to be done, Lute! Speak, old fool!" He raged so, that Luty became alarmed. At length he ventured to say,—

"We must seek him up, get friends with him, and then bribe him out of it. I know of no other way, Mr. Errton. Do you?"

"Some way must and shall be done."

Was a plan of action fixed upon then and there? Probably, for they whispered a great deal, and appeared to come to a decision respecting something. Luty left soon after, and repaired to his ruined hut on the Roughs. But he didn't lie down on his old chaff bed until late, or rather early. He had no inclination for sleep, being in an agitated, indignant, scornful mood of mind. At one o'clock he was pacing his cold, stone floor, half-undressed, talking to himself.

"What a world is this, Lute," he said. "What spite and

spitting, kicking and killing, amidst our boasted education and refinement, religion and commerce! Who's better, I wonder, or healthier, or happier, than were our forefathers, when living by the hook and the arrow? I don't know of any one. But I know this, I'd fly from it all into an American forest, if I could. I'm disgusted with the whole thing, if I know my own feelings. It's a piece of gilded deception and injustice from beginning to end. That's what it is. And I'm just as sick of those who profess to be trying to mend things, as of those who make them worse. They're a mere rope of sand. And the men who meet up here are just as bad, in their way, as others. They slight thee, Lute, and put upon thee, because they fancy thee poor and simple. They, forsooth, who have set out on a crusade against such things. Indolent, mean dogs! They'll whine and snivel, if the rich don't treat them with the utmost forbearance and consideration: but to those below themselves, they're snappish as curs, and overbearing beyond endurance. And now, that Simeon Sykes has it in his power to ruin thee! To ruin thee, who hast seen him twenty times on the edge of a precipice, down which thou mightest have pushed him! Bungling hand that thou art, Errton! Curse thy own and not another's limbs. If Luty thought that thou would'st sink alone, he'd leave thee to thy fate this time, and do no more of thy dirty work. But if not rescued, thou'lt carry him down. So he must be thy base tool a little longer. He must make up his mind to receive more insolence from thee. To appear little and mean and sheepish, that thou mayst, by contrast, look bold and manly. He must go on laughing at thy sayings as smart things, when inwardly he has the utmost contempt for them. He must pretend to wince under thy sarcasms when he feels them to be entirely pointless. He must go on, knowing nothing, being nothing, that thou mayst be all and in all. And for what? For a paltry pound now and then! and for work by which men starve! But there will be an end to this as soon as that letter is recovered. I'll change thy course for thee, Lute. Oh, that it were recovered! Fool that thou wast to let him slip! Thou let go a murderer. But about that be silent, or other trouble may come to thee."

As time wore on, Leechy Luty's self-reproaches for having let Simeon slip away, acquired considerable bitterness, for the simple reason that he found it very difficult to obtain any information respecting him. And the young man's prolonged absence from home, which to him was a source of annoyance, was to others a subject of eager conjecture. Why had he left? And why did he remain so long away? To bring home some splendid fortune, said Dinah Sykes. To do nothing at all of the sort, replied Mrs. Lee. Hilda whispered that it might be to shake off his old companions; her uncle, that it might be to identify himself more closely with them. Robert and Luther could have offered opinions; for the former had mentioned to the latter what he had seen. But they did not. Weeks passed, and nothing was heard. Weeks of frost and snow, sleet and sludge; of alternate hope and depression to Dinah Sykes; of painful surmises and gloomy forebodings to Hilda; of quiet mornings and bustling evenings at the old school-house; of cold and apprehension, mysterious movements and secret assemblies, on the Roughs, and of discontent and complaining in M——.

To the majority in and about M——, that was a dull, dull time, which dated from the night of the fearful hurricane, to the end of February. It was a dull time to the handloom weavers. Some toiled with dreary monotony at patched and frost-fretted windows, brooding with dejected air o'er the tale of sorrow told by the unremunerative loom; while others huddled, with starving children, around ashy fires, no work for their hands, nor pleasant thoughts for their head. Some sought to lighten the burden of their leisure, by drawing pictures of what they hoped the future would be, with the mad march of machinery effectually checked; and others, by dwelling on the happy past, when they could make handsome wages in half the week, and spend the remainder in riotous living or excessive drinking, without fear of poverty.

It was a dull time to Mr. Errton. Profits came in slowly, and he was by no means sure that it would be the wisest and safest thing in the world to venture upon a reduction of wages, and thus give himself the benefit of a slight breeze, and

a rather larger margin of gains. Beside, he found it a by no means pleasant thing, carrying in his bosom so strong a passion for revenge, with its object he knew not where. For such a passion he had; a passion which, being fierce and furious, something like a maddened war-horse chafing and pawing to get at the enemy, devolved upon him the uncongenial task of holding it by a firm hand and watching it with a wary eye.

To "the Company" it was a dull time; for, being ready to commence operations—eager to do so—they noted with little interest the varied phenomena of a winter that was beginning to linger too long to suit their convenience. They sighed for the streaming forth of the influences of spring, that the frosty bands which tie up the prolific energies of nature might be loosed, and a way thus prepared for their cutting the sod and getting to work.

To Robert Morgan it was a dull time; at least, much duller than what he had anticipated. He had calculated upon a happy—ay, a merry winter, dating from the hour of his reconciliation to Hilda. Oh! bright seemed his path stretching on into the future! Bright with the golden light flung from her presence! A gorgeous thing and grand, was that path—a thing of velvet lawns and delicious shades, twining flowers and overhanging fruits; of music on spreading branches and in scented zephyrs; where the morning came soft and balmy, and waxed into a noon of dreamy languor; where, freighted with poetry and purest passion, they passed cheerily and airily along, or reposed on mossy banks, arched with climbing roses, now wreathing garlands of fragrant flowers, and now dreaming dreams of untold happiness. A path which care and disappointment and grief, hateful members of a squalid brood of tormentors, hadn't found out; which they would never dare to darken with their gloomy reign, or to pollute by their vile touch. Ah! those visioned paths! How common! yet how illusory! Common—for who does not hope to leave, some day, the din and dust, the pride and provocation, the competition and contention of life's hard, dry, bustling highway, and step into one of those fairy-land avenues, there to live in blissful reverie? Illusory—for who has ever found such an inheritance?

Youthful lovers, with throbbing hearts, have passed what they hoped was its threshold, and stood, as they dreamt, in its presence, expecting to be calmed by its luscious hush, and captivated by its melody and music; but have soon found that they were still in the world's rugged path, with a pack of barking cares around them, and their shifting elysium far before them.

Robert's elysium certainly shifted. He soon found out that it was a thing of the future; an intangible, flitting sort of thing, which flew before him as eagerly he followed after it. In fact, it flew out of sight. He began to lose confidence in Hilda, and to despair of ever realizing his hopes. He observed indications in her countenance of some deep anxiety, and not a little of mystery about her movements. Jealousy suggested that she was transferring her love to another, and intriguing to effect a clandestine and successful flight. He was confirmed in his fears by a very suspicious augur, which he twice beheld ere breathing his tormenting thoughts to any one. It was Leechy Luty in earnest conversation with Hilda. The first time he saw this, was one evening at her father's door; the other time was in broad daylight, near to Mr. Errton's. What could it mean? No good; that was settled. Was Leechy in the interest of that Blamins? Not at all improbable. Likely enough he was the medium of communication between them. And Hilda, upon whom he had doted, and for whom he was prepared to make every sacrifice, would act such a faithless part, and throw herself away upon a wretch, incapable of either loving or doing her justice! With jealous eye he watched her. Yet not by word or look did she slight him. There seemed no abatement in the ardour of her affection. She was kind, gentle, attentive. Apparently depressed at times, but certainly not cold towards him. How was it? Oh! whispered an evil voice, she is a deceiver! A deceiver and a flirt; and the heart that had held so much love, tried to steel itself against her. Cruel love! In thy most ardent mood most jealous! and in thy jealousy most uncharitable! Self-tormenting, too, thou art, stinging thyself through and through. Life's common courtesies are to thee as fiery goads. Thy

object cannot receive the friendly pressure of another's hand, but thou, forsooth, must frown. Thy busy fancy hints that each whisper conveys some vile overture. To sit beside thy idol and receive a smile, is a favour which from thine inmost heart thou dost begrudge, and which thou'rt ever ready to imagine will be wantonly abused. Scant is the liberty thou dolest out, and full of hints and evils to thy surmising mind, are a thousand harmless acts, common in the intercourse of life. See in this, O man, a righteous retribution for making idols of those who are only human, not divine.

Robert took an early opportunity to hint to Hilda, that he was aware of her intimacy with Leechy Luty, and how that he inferred that she must have queer and questionable work on hand. This was injudicious. Hilda denied that she was intimate with Luty ; but did not say to the young man how it was that they had come together, or what it was about which they talked. From that hour a widening gulf appeared between them. They often met at Mrs. Lee's, but were shy and cold. The cancer of distrust began to form in their hearts. Robert's grew and gnawed away at his love, with savage spite. It received alarming energy one evening from the presence of Leechy Luty at the cottage ; and again, from one day seeing Hilda and Mr. Errton in earnest conversation. This almost brought the cancer to a head. It was at a lonely bend of the road crossing the moor. Mr. Errton was in a shabby conveyance he sometimes drove. Hilda was standing on the road. It appeared to young Morgan that he was making some indelicate proposal to her, for he was leaning out of his gig and leering into her face, which was partly averted, and covered with crimson blushes. It was a fearful moment to the young man when he passed them. They hadn't seen him approach, and were hence taken a little aback. Hilda held up her head as if to speak, appearing much relieved ; but he, in his indignation, moved on, without condescending to bestow upon her even the barest recognition. And so, gentle spirit, thou hadst to bear thy heavy trial alone, when thy heart was yearning for help and advice, and most of all for his !



## CHAPTER XVII.

## A SELF-EMANCIPATED SLAVE CHASTISES HIS MASTER.

It is seven o'clock ; fine, calm, starlight. Robert Morgan is at Mrs. Lee's, having called on his way home from Bower and Bray's. Hilda of course is there. Neither has yet alluded to the meeting on the moor the other day. They are shy and cold. Robert was puzzled, and is yet puzzled, by what he then saw. It diverted his thoughts from Blamins to Hand Errton, with whom they still reside. " Why, surely, the old bachelor hasn't courting in his head ! If he has, I know enough of human nature to convince me, that her mother will encourage it, and that there is small chance for you, sir. Oh, this money ! It can buy beautiful wives, as well as the best wines." As he looks at her, he can't help wishing that she was less interesting and fair, that the risk of losing her might be diminished. But he doesn't speak, nor does she. The fire seems to have wonderful attractions for her thoughtful gaze. She looks, and looks, and looks. At length, thrusting the back of the book held in her hand against her chin, but with eyes still fastened on the fascinating glow in the grate, she asks Mrs. Lee something that has reference to the moon. A thought occurs to Robert Morgan, and, to Luther's great astonishment, he rises, and intimates his intention of leaving. Still Hilda's eyes hold on to the fire. She must be expecting to see the moon rise from behind that fizzing coal. She speaks again, the book pressed against her chin as before. It is about going out. She must go. Luther offers to accompany her, observing that the departure of his friend Socrates has left him with an alarming stock of time on his hands. His offer, however, is politely declined. Oh ! he sees how the case stands. She and Morgan

are for a nocturnal excursion, which is a capital idea. He wouldn't interfere for the world. He is told that he is as far from the truth as east is from west. After a little more fire-gazing, she leaves her cousin, and goes quietly to her small bed-room. She is standing in front of the looking-glass, putting on her bonnet, when there is a gentle tap at the door, followed by Mrs. Lee.

"Hilda," she says, as she walks into view, "I trust you're not going far alone, this evening."

"Not far, aunt. I hope to be back soon."

"Why doesn't Robert Morgan go with you?"

"I don't know."

"Have you a quarrel? I've observed that this evening, and other times lately, you've been very distant with each other."

Hilda is silent. She is fastening on her "fall." As she looks in the glass to do so, she sees a slight moisture collecting on her eyeballs. It continues to ooze from its hidden springs, until it becomes thick enough to throw back broken, trembling images of the candle before her. It gathers on her eyelashes, and dims her sight; so she lifts her "fall," and gently shakes her head, and hot tears drop at her feet. Mrs. Lee resumes:—

"I trust, Hilda, Robert isn't guilty of any unfairness toward you? That would indeed be base, after the sacrifices you have made, and the kindness of your uncle."

"Aunt! I've not a word to say against Robert Morgan. May be, he doesn't understand me. Perhaps it would be strange if he did. But I must away."

She kisses Mrs. Lee with more than usual fondness, and whispers, "Aunt, pray for me."

M——, of course, contains a portion of that important national element called "the rising generation;" an element much nursed and petted and indulged, but which no sooner becomes capable of attending to the business of life, than it pushes those that reared it into indolence and obscurity; just as one part of a stream will hurry on another, that it may sport in its predecessor's place and murmur with its voice. A numerous brood of this noisy element is at play in the "fold." Hilda thinks nothing of the circumstance, but hastens on.

Somebody else does though. An observer, by losing himself amongst them, is able, unseen, to note the direction she takes. He does so, and follows at a distance. After getting clear of the village, she stops and looks about. Of course somebody else does the same. "Where next, miss?" her observer mentally asks. A dark, muffled-up form comes from behind the thorn hedge. The observer's heart thumps away tremendously, as if it would call his attention to some danger to which Hilda is exposed. He restrains himself and watches, in quite a fever of excitement. It approaches her and they speak. "Who can it be?" the watcher asks himself. "Perhaps it's Blamins! or may be, it's Simeon! If it isn't Simeon, it may be Hand Errton! It is Hand Errton, for they turn into the footpath leading to his house." They cross stile after stile without halting. Their spy pushes on, and disguising himself as well as he can, walks close up to them and then passes them. Hilda turns her face curiously towards him, but doesn't speak. The dark, muffled-up form, two yards before her, isn't Hand Errton, but Leechy Luty. He is soon a-head of them, and not doubting that their destination is Mr. Errton's, he selects a post of observation commanding a view of the front door of that gentleman's dwelling, that he may fully satisfy himself on this point. It is so. They come up, knock, and enter. As they walk along the passage, to Errton's room, Hilda feels that his sister is staring hard at her. And well she may stare, she thinks, at a female who, in the company of such a man as Leechy Luty, will visit such a house as Hand Errton's. He's glad to see them, and begs them to take chairs. He appears much excited; the effect, Hilda infers from the flavour of the hot air, of strong brandy. He insists on shaking hands with her, and on lifting up her "fall." She reluctantly allows him to do the former, but commands him to desist from the latter.

"But I must look at thy face, as I talk, my lady. I'm quite captivated with that face, Lute."

Luty rubs his forehead with his rough hand, and remains silent.

"Mr. Errton," Hilda observes firmly, "I have not come here to trifle. I have come at your request, to say that I'll do *what you desired.*"

"I'm glad to hear it, my sweet lady. So lift up that ugly veil, for my strongest desire then was, and is now, to look at thy face."

Hilda begins to tremble, but not to comply. That she has resolved not to do. She'll be firm. There is a female in the house, and if he begin to be rude, she'll appeal to her and Luty. She somehow has confidence in the hermit of the Roughs. Being conscious of something very near her, she lifts her eyes, which she had turned in her abashment towards the floor, and is startled by a hard-featured face close to her "fall," and a pair of wildly-rolling eyes staring eagerly at her. As she meets the brutal gaze of those eyes, and inhales by necessity the brandy-seasoned breath coming from that mouth, a slight premonition of fainting comes upon her. "Oh, above all things I musn't do that," she says to herself, and turns away from the disgusting sight.

"Well, well," Mr. Errton observes, stalking to a side cupboard, "let it be so for the present. Thou'lt come round, I guess. What wilt thou take, Miss Sykes? You, you, I ought to say. I'm so thoroughly Quakerified, that I take for granted everybody will put up with my rudeness. Won't you speak, my dear?"

"Nothing, sir, thank you."

"Nothing!" he exclaims, holding up a glass in his hand. "Then you shall have tea presently. I insist on thy—you're being at home here. Lute! what dost thou say? Best brandy, I'll warrant."

"Not any, ah thank ye."

"Poh, old fool! Dost thou hope to make her believe thou's joined those temperance folk? See! whip that off, and then call for another."

He goes to his chair, folds his arms, and leering at the veiled form beside him, resumes:—

"Well, I'm right glad, Miss Sykes, I've prevailed upon thee—you, to warm up this old hole by your presence. I see precious little of female society; and the little I do see doesn't do me much good. I'm shut up mostly to my sister, and she's a tartar, isn't she, Lute?"

Harry shrinks as the door shuts and observes with much apparent reluctance that she has her ways.

"Her ways," Errton repeats, turning his head; "that she has. And such ways. She makes me far worse than I otherwise should be. Every 'pull off' Laura begins with her. She insists that as a matter of principle I ought to 'pull off.' 'Now Errol! she says. You must give them another screw down. My vealworts vines are getting sadly improved. I seem nobody when I pass them in Sundays. I'll do 'em good. Bring 'em down, bring 'em down.' So in a way, I'm driven to do 'em good. She is a sister, Miss Sykes, and no mistake. She drinks nothing but brandy, and reads nothing but Fox's *Martyrs*. She revels in those pictures of torture, and has tried some of them in her tea. Of course you are aware, Miss, that I'm unmarried."

"Oh yes," Hilda answers.

"Thank thee—you for taking so much interest in me as to ascertain that fact. I feel flattered."

"Pray don't suppose, Mr. Errton, that I've given myself the least trouble to ascertain it. If you do, you will give me credit for having done something that I most certainly have not done. It's a matter of the least moment to me."

"Now, my dear Miss Sykes, don't be so cruel. Don't give it out that you are so sublimely indifferent to everything belonging to me! Don't now! Don't torture one with the persuasion that you are so absorbed in the stars with those Morgans that you can't see a poor, prostrate manufacturer at your footstool. But I'll order you some tea; may be that will mend matters."

"Mr. Errton, Mr. Errton, I beg you won't," Hilda says.

"Oh, beggars aren't noticed here. At least my sister doesn't notice 'em. A slammed door is all they get for their lying tales and starved looks. She does it to throw them on to the labour market, that that article may become a little cheaper."

These remarks he addresses to the fire. After a minute's silence, he rises, and leaves the room.

"O Leechy," Hilda observes in a low tone, "I wish I'd

never come. I wish I was away. Be sure and don't stir an inch without me."

"Miss Sykes, allow me to give you a word of advice. Don't carry your head so bolt upright. Just humour him a little. It may be better for all sides. If I was you I'd 'trail' him a bit. It appears to me you might do it; he seems so fond of you."

"Leechy, how can you say so? Have you brought me here to be ruined? O God! that I'd known of this plot!"

"There's no plot, Hilda. And you shall not be ruined, not even insulted, in my presence. But as he has power to cause those near to you much trouble, I'd please him by talking nicely to him. Just try, and I'll—," Mr. Errton's heavy footsteps are at the door again.

"Well, Miss Sykes, I'm happy in being able to say that my sister will make you a cup of tea. Lute! there is something for thee, so go and get it."

"If you please, Mr. Errton, I desire that Luty may remain with us."

"Why, what a timid dove you are! who's going to hurt you? You'll surely let me do as I think for the best, in my own house! Beside, I've something to say that I don't want that old tell-tale to hear."

Leechy looks at Hilda. She concludes that it will be best to humour Mr. Errton a little; so she says, "You may go for a few minutes, Leechy," and throws up, at the same time, her "fall," and tosses back her ringlets.

"There," Mr. Errton observes, in a way indicative of relief and gratification, "let in a little light. It's a pity that face should rust behind such a nasty blind."

"Now, Mr. Errton, allow me to state, before another word is said, that I accept your offer. I'll use every endeavour to find my brother, and obtain from him those papers if they should be in his possession, on condition that you will do what you said. I'm deeply grieved that he should have done what he has done; but for a long while he has disregarded uncle's advice, and hence I'm not greatly surprised."

"Well, well, Miss Sykes," he replies, standing with his back

to the fire, and thrusting his left hand through his hair, and deeming himself, no doubt, very generous, "I'll not be hard upon you. You are too much of an angel for that. But let it alone just now, and think of another matter."

As he utters the last sentence, he throws an amazing deal of fondness into his face and voice; and placing a chair near to Hilda, sits down upon it. He next swings the elbow of his left arm over the back of the chair, and shapes his fist into a pedestal on its arched top, with a nice concave surface, into which he settles his chin. These proceedings Hilda finds have brought his repulsive eyes into very near vicinity to her own, and threaten soon to surround her with quite an atmosphere of brandy-seasoned breath and air and nauseous fumes. He continues :—

"Now, my dear, what do you think of me?"

"What do you mean by this behaviour?" Hilda asks, with a touch of indignation in her tone. She does not look right at him, but casts a furtive and rather fiery glance.

"Oh, as you will be at the point at once, I'll tell. I'm in love with thee—you, Miss Sykes. I am indeed. And now, as I've let it out, I'll be serious and sober about it." He sits erect in his chair, and appears really serious. "It is a fact, ma'am, that since seeing you on the moor, I've been amongst the most wretched of men. And I now wish to say, that if you'll give me your hand in token of acceptance, your brother is forgiven, my money is at your service, and I am at once the happiest of men. Now, what do you say, Miss Sykes?"

"I say that you ought to be ashamed of yourself for alluring me here to insult me by such an offer."

"Now, come, Miss Sykes, be honest. Don't you think it a capital offer? Just think what fifty thousand pounds will buy! What dresses and fine furniture! Why, it will admit of a carriage and pair! I've always thought you females prepared for any venture that promised fine things. You surely don't hesitate?"

"Mr. Errton, I can't stay to hear you talk in this way. I must, and shall go." She rises, but her tormentor places himself between her and the door, and says,—

"Nay, nay, not in this abrupt way. Consider well what thou dost, Miss. Think of what may follow if I'm slighted. I've the rope around the neck of one of thy family, and can ruin thee. Where is thy character, if I like? Art not thou alone with me? Aren't Lute and my sister witnesses? Don't be hasty."

"Mr. Errton," she replies, her voice trembling with emotion, "I didn't expect this of you. I didn't, indeed."

"No more did I a week ago."

"To take such a liberty with an unprotected woman in your own house!"

"Liberty, do you say, Miss Sykes! Offering you fifty thousand pounds! It's a liberty that shouldn't be resented in my opinion. And as to taking it with a female, why you're a fool if you suppose I'd take it with a male! Come, let's be friends."

He puts out his hand to take hold of hers. She steps back, and calls upon him to clear the way and allow her to depart.

"Not just yet, my dear. I'm hardly accustomed to obey any one so very promptly. Now don't go backwards after that fashion. You'll be in the grate next move, and we shall then have the fire-engines to run for."

Hand Errton is slowly approaching her as he talks, and gradually filling her whole soul with indignation and disgust. Being unable farther to retreat, he closes in upon her, and catches at her hands. Those she dexterously throws behind her, and commands him back.

"I'll cry murder if you don't stand off!" she exclaims. "I will!"

"Cry what thou wilt! No cries are heeded here," and diving his hands behind her, he gains his point. Her whole frame quivers, soon as she feels his hateful touch; and summoning all her powers of voice, she calls out, just as he's beginning to chuckle,—

"Leechy! Leechy!"

"What now, fool? Lute will as soon put out his eyes as peep in here unasked by me."



Not so, Mr. Errton. For once thou art deceived, with even him. For once he shows thee that he's every inch a man. He lets thee see for once what there is in the tool thou hast deemed so blunt. Luty rushes in, and awakes his master's surprise and wrath.

"Lute!" he says, "out of this room in an instant, or I'll bury my fist in thy face."

The hermit of the Roughts walks up to him, and commands him to let go the hand of Hilda. There is something very menacing in his manner, and furious in his eye. The manufacturer, beside whose "pieceboard" Leechy has so often trembled, is quite astounded. Luty must be mad. So putting on a terribly magisterial air, he calls out,—

"Scoundrel! where are thy senses! Out of this room in—"

"I say, Errton, let go! or by the Lord in heaven, I'll cut off your hand. I will. I—"

Errton resigns his hold, and steps back, his face one scene of blank astonishment. Leechy—poor, timid, spiritless Leechy—has produced a knife, which he clasps and puts back into his pocket, as Errton retreats.

"And now," he goes on, "as you've done that, I'll talk with you. You call me a scoundrel; what do you call yourself, I wish to know? Shame upon you, black-hearted rascal! And after what you promised me too! I've half a mind to shoot you through the head this instant, that I have."

The astonishment of Hand Errton is beyond all bounds. He seems stunned for a minute. And Luty appears to Hilda an entirely different man. So bold, so manly, and for him, so eloquent! Poor Luty! thou hast reached that point beyond which human nature cannot endure more. Thou knowest thy alternative, but it cannot be avoided. Death thou hast resolved to risk—ay, a hundred deaths in one—rather than continue longer in thy galling bondage. It isn't for more than a minute that the manufacturer allows himself to be paralysed. Of course it's in his *place* to crush Leechy; and to this he feels further stimulated and called by the presence of his sister, who has rushed into the room.

"It appears, Jane," he observes, walking to the fire, "that we've got a madman there. But I would just say to him, that his days are certainly numbered. We don't usually hang maniacs, but there'll be an exception in thy case, Lute. Thou mayst take thyself away, and this street strumpet with thee; but remember, thou'lt be sought up in the morning pretty early. And may be, Miss, thou'lt be wanted again."

He tries to appear cool, careless, defiant, as has been his wont. But he can't conceal his astonishment at and apprehension of Leechy Luty, who is pacing about like a caged, but infuriated bear.

"Mr. Errton!" he says, fixing his eyes steadily on that gentleman's face, "just—"

"Don't talk to me! Don't pollute the room with thy vile speech! Don't further soil the walls with thy filthy breath! Out for a dog that I'd hang on the nearest tree, if I durst pinion thy leprous limbs! I say away!"

He stamps in quite a passion, notwithstanding his affected self-possession. But Luty doesn't seem inclined to leave until he has unburdened his mind. So when Errton pauses, he again essays to speak, and this time successfully. The master holds down his head, whilst the servant, or rather late servant, thus proceeds:—

"Hand Errton! hear what I've got to say. It's a word of notice and of warning, which I think it fair to utter, whilst I am yet in your power. From this time, from this minute, I cease to be your dirty instrument and the keeper of your secrets. I warn you, that if you don't cut me down, I'll publish far and wide what I've been employed by you to do. And oh! doesn't God know that I've had work on hand of yours for which you ought just now to be hung? Doesn't he know that I've had to sneak as a spy into the weavers' work-rooms, to bring thee tidings of their ways, because thy jealous spirit was ever suspecting them of roguery? Doesn't he know that thou'st dogged me to hound on others' men to strike, that masters might be driven to get power-looms, and thus bring down the price of labour? That thou'st tried by bribes and bargains to induce me to use every artifice in my power to

accomplish the complete ruin of that young Sykes, that trouble might come to his relations and a stain upon the family name? That the late attempt to break into and plunder Sykes's house was of thy planning and plotting, to thwart the designs of the company, lest thy weavers and hands should be tempted away from thee by the offer of higher wages? And don't I—"

"Ha, ha, ha! old fool!" This interruption is from Hand Errton, who would have Hilda and his sister believe that he's quite amused with the insanity of Leechy. He doesn't lift up his eyes though from the rug on which he stands. Luty, not heeding him, goes on.

"Detest myself for the part I've played? And wouldn't I have broken faith with thee long ago, hadn't thou threatened me with instant death if ever I should do so? So I served thee because I feared death; but I don't now fear it, so I serve thee no more. Fear it now! Why should I? Wouldn't I sooner feel a pistol's bullet in my throbbing brain than carry the guilty conscience I do in my bosom? Wouldn't I sooner lie down just now, in the filthiest, dismalest, darkest grave that was ever dug on moor or mountain, than lie down on thy bed, with this conviction of degradation upon me? I don't feel worthy the name of man, because of the cursed service I've rendered thee. Nor of another hour of life. Did I know the word that would turn thee murderer, and prompt thine arm to brandish the glittering blade with maniac rage, and run it to my heart's core, I'd speak it at once! Not for an instant should it linger on my lips. I've had my fill of life and of servile service. I've bowed to thy insolence for the last time. And thou hopedst that I would quietly wink at thy foul liberties with this young woman! Not so. And if there is one deed, the recollection of which will give me joy—"

"On the gallows, Lute!"

"Ay! or when I die by my own hand, it will be having delivered her out of thy power."

"For the present, lad, for the present. Now, Lute, if thou hast let off all thy steam, just let thyself out of this domicile, and recollect thy hut is mined, and that I've the end of the train in this room."

"Arrant fool! Art thou mined? I guess thou art, and that the end of the train is in the lowest region. A credulous child, indeed, thou hast shown thyself all along, to suppose that I heeded what thou consideredst thy smart sayings. I loathe myself for having so far flattered thy vanity as to appear to believe and heed them. I could pluck out my eyes for having expressed wonder and admiration, for I never felt them. Thou supposed, because I was poor and passive; because I lived in a lonely hut, and submitted to starve upon what I could earn by toiling for thee; because I spoke blunderingly and seldom, and seemed ill at ease in thy noble presence, that I'd got no mind and no thoughts, and that I should gulp down whatever monstrous thing thou mightst think proper to say. Poor, vain coxcomb! didn't I know it pleased thee when I appeared sheepish, timid, empty-headed? That it made thee feel like an emperor? And haven't I noted all this, and shaped my course accordingly? Didn't I know that it would be fatal to outwit thee? And don't thousands of working men know the same? Don't they laugh at what you rich consider your clever jokes and crack sayings, because they know they're expected to do so?—laugh, when inwardly they despise them as the tamest, driest, stalest rubbish lips ever uttered? It's because you hold above their heads the crust by which they live, that, dog-like, they bark to please you. Were they—"

"I say, Lute, have done, and beat a retreat, or I'll shoot thee."

It is clear that Leechy is touching Errton in a tender point. The proud manufacturer storms, as the bare thought that Lute may have been "trailing" him, dawns upon his mind. It is a most mortifying reversing of the positions which he imagined they sustained to each other. It isn't to be endured for a moment; so he says again,—

"Dost hear, Lute! Beat a retreat, or I'll shoot thee!"

"And you follow after, impudent hussy," Jane Errton adds, addressing Hilda. "And be ashamed of yourself for coming to single gentlemen's houses at such untimely hours."

"She'll be sure to do that, Jane," her brother observes, with a touch of his usual careless, off-hand way. "She doesn't like

either of us very much, that's pretty clear. I only wish she mayn't be found murdered, in the morning, in some ditch."

"Serve her right, and him too, and you likewise for allowing this hurly-burly."

Leechy and Hilda leave the room; for the former fears that if he gall Errton much more, he may vent his fury upon the latter. They grope their way, unlighted, along the passage, to the open air. The watcher is still at his post, but they do not see him. He keeps an eye upon them, as they bend their quick steps towards M——; and by taking short cuts, and posting himself at different angles of the road, manages to hear a large proportion of their conversation as they pass. He learns that Luty is telling Hilda how that, being poor, he fell into Errton's net; that not liking modern ways and weaknesses, he had lent himself to oppose them; how that he had long hated his connection with Errton, but feared to break it, as the manufacturer had threatened to shoot, or get him shot, if he did; how that of late he had given himself to reading and to thinking much, though no one yet had found it out; and how that the more he had read and thought, the more he disliked his "carryings on," and the more he desired to bring them to an end. He was glad he had done so, although he knew the cost was home, country, and not unlikely life itself. He hastens towards another bend in the road, and by creeping along behind the hedge, manages to overhear a little more of their conversation. The topic, he finds, has been changed, Simeon being now the subject of their dialogue. Leechy begs her to think no more of either Errton's threats or promises, and not to try to find her brother, assuring her that he can break the tyrant's power for mischief. He gains another point, and finds that again the topic's changed. He himself is now their theme. Leechy congratulates her on her fortune in being wooed by Robert Morgan, and tells her how that her brother had risked her ruin by all but selling her to a gambler and a spendthrift. They part at the cottage door, with kind words and hearty shakings of each others' hand, and the watcher hastens to the school-house, wondering at, and thoughtfully pondering until late, what this evening he has seen and heard.

The following morning Hilda appeared anxious, and even ill. The evening's adventure had been succeeded by a nearly sleepless night, which had left her, of course, weary and wan. Her waking hours had been full of troubled thoughts; and in the brief intervals in which she had snatched a moment's sleep, her mind had been crowded with feverish dreams about Errton and his hated offer—Leechy and his unlooked-for kindness. Respecting the fate of the latter she was more concerned, however, than about anything that had happened to herself. Hence she resolved to lose no time in repairing to the hut on the Roughs, in order to learn what he intended doing to escape the wrath of the manufacturer, and if in any way she could befriend him. But to go alone might not be prudent. She would, therefore, ask her cousin to accompany her. He and his mother had both observed her altered looks; hence he commended her for proposing to take a morning walk, and cheerfully consented to bear her company. She was doubtful as to whether it would be a wise thing to disclose to her cousin then all that had taken place at Errton's the previous evening. He was somewhat impulsive, and might be driven to some rash act by way of being revenged on Errton. She told him, however, that she had particular reasons for wishing to see Leechy Luty, at which he stared; and further, that she had particular reasons for wishing to do him an act of kindness, at which he stared yet more, observing, that he had particular reasons for wishing to see him hung.

"You don't know everything, cousin, I find."

"Of course I don't. I don't know what you were doing out so late last evening, nor why you should look so pale this morning. Do you poach, Hilda?"

"Hardly that, cousin. But let us push on. I hope I now look better. I certainly feel better. What a wonderful effect this fresh morning air has on one's spirits!"

It was clear and sunny, and as they ascended the Roughs, Hilda felt as if an invigorating influence came from every pore of the rugged path they trod; as if each cloud above them was scattering from its fleecy folds an invisible dew of health and strength and joy, free for all who would walk abroad. Magni-

ficient scenery lay around them, which seemed to stretch out as they neared the summit of the hill; but Hilda did not pause to look and admire, so often as was her wont in such circumstances, on account of an uneasy feeling that rested on her mind respecting Luty. She had a foreboding, which strengthened as they approached the hut, that all would not be right. Alas! her apprehensions were too well grounded. The hut presented one scene of disorder. Violence had been hard at work. The smooth, elevated flag which had served him as a table, was broken into a hundred pieces; the round, hard stone with which it had been smashed, lying amongst its ruins. On the hearth was the rusty "fire-range," just as it had fallen on being wrenched from its place, partly buried in the half-burnt turf and ashes and *debris*, which, undermined by its removal, and magnanimously resolving to share its degradation, had followed it in its descent. The delf-case had been chopped into innumerable splinters, which lay mixed up with the broken plates which for so many years it had faithfully supported. The old stools, deprived of their legs, were lying prostrate on the floor; whilst the bobbin-wheel, bruised and broken, had its head stuck into a hole in the wall and its hind feet elevated in the air, which gave it the appearance of a little mettled steed, kicking away at the desertion and desolation around it. But it was to the loom that the destroyer had directed his chief energies and attention. Its beams and boards and treadles had been riven and hacked as if with demon spite. The woven fabric it contained had been burnt full of black, staring holes, rank as the gaping wounds inflicted on the frame that held it; whilst the coarse warp had been maliciously unwound, and its trailing, tangled threads, dragged in meshed heaps over and around the loom, there twisted into knots that no genius could untie, and here torn and marred by its jagged edges and rusty nails. A flag, a part of the floor, was raised on end in one corner of the wrecked room, the earth beneath it bearing traces of having been recently disturbed. The crazy window-frames had been relieved of the responsibility of holding any panes; apparently by some hand from without, for the scene of chaos was pretty well sanded with pieces of broken glass.

Luther was a little startled on looking round, and called out at once for Leechy; but no voice nor sound of any kind answered him. It occurred to him to peep into the other place. All was order there.

"Well," he observed, as he came stooping out, "they've made a clean sweep of Luty, anyhow. I'll wager you a kiss, cousin, that he's murdered!"

Hilda began to tremble.

"His ways have found him out; or rather some party has found out that his ways aren't just the thing. I've long suspected him."

"Whom do you suppose it may be?" Her thoughts turned at once to Hand Errton.

"That's a rather bold question, cuz. Whoever it may be, they've not much respect for Hand Errton's property. Only look at this warp. But I've something to ask you, Hilda. Why did you wish to see Luty? I'd no idea that you knew much of him."

"Oh, Luty did me a great kindness last night. He was then alive and well; and if he's murdered, I'm sorry for it. I hoped to be able to befriend him."

"I'm glad to hear that he was capable of doing an act of kindness. But let's away from this dismal hole. Mischief may come out of our being here if we're not cautious."

Ere that day closed the news had flown through M—— and its neighbourhood, that the robbers had been on the Roughs, and that Leechy Luty had been murdered. Some said that he had been found in a ditch, with his head nearly severed from his body. Others, that he had been found suspended to a tree, stiff and cold. And others, that he had been foully shot and stabbed in bed. These reports attracted large numbers to the Roughs, but no one cared to fathom the mystery, or to trace out the murderer.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## TREATS OF SUNDAY MATTERS.

For several days Hilda's mind was on a rack. The torture and tension told at length. She became ill ; seriously ill. Old Mr. Cooper, the medical man, was alarmed. She was to be kept still ; disinfectants were to be distributed about the rooms of the cottage ; and even her friends were not to be allowed to see her. It was fever ; a bad case of fever. M—— was soon acquainted with the fact, and the partially blinded window soon became an object of morbid interest, and the doctor's visits topics of inquisitive gossip. Old dames shook their heads, and intimated that they held her recovery to be a very doubtful thing, whilst a few envious damsels boldly declared themselves indifferent to her recovery. Some thought it a judgment on the family, for the uncle's active connection with the "great project," and others, a rebuke of Hilda's and her aunt's pride. Whatever might be the design, or mission, of the fever, it went vigorously to work. It soon had her completely in its power, insomuch that Mr. Cooper and Mrs. Lee began to think that it would entirely vanquish her. And so thought Robert Morgan and Luther one day, when Mrs. Lee brought down her long tresses of hair, and held them out before the young men with an ominous shake of her head. It was to them a mournful and suggestive sight.

"There's danger, Bob," Luther observed, "great danger. It's only when they believe the vessel to be sinking, that doctors order such cargo as that to be thrown overboard. Poor Hilda!"

On, on, went the fever with its work of conquest, attacking the mind after having thoroughly subdued the body. It struck down judgment and maimed memory, leaving little besides

imagination, lawless and wild, as if goaded to madness by the foe that sought to carry it captive. The consequence of this was, that Hilda "rambled" a great deal, and that Mrs. Lee, her attendant, was by turns amused, surprised, and puzzled. At one time, she would earnestly request her aunt to order that man from the room, declaring that she would not receive his attentions, and threatening to apprise her Uncle Sykes if he did not cease his visits; and at another, she would remonstrate with her brother, and urge him to break away from his companions, and associate more with Luther and Robert Morgan. Now she would cry out that Hand Errton was at the window, or trying to circle her waist with his strong arm, and moan piteously, as if in the deepest distress; and now, that he was clubbing Leechy Luty on the Roughs, and now kicking his mauled body into a pit. Then she would close her eyes with an expression of intensest agony on her face, and declare that they were about to hang her mother for dealing in counterfeit coin; and then would cry out that she saw her brother, and that she hoped to be able to return to Errton the stolen letter, and receive from him the bad money that was to convict and ruin her parent. These things filled Mrs. Lee with uneasy thoughts, and perplexed both her brother and son, to whom she related them. Fortunately for the solution of these problems, the fever passed its crisis without passing its subject into the world of spirits. Its utmost might failed to crush her; and joyful were the tidings of the turn to the inmates of the old school-house, to Messrs. Bower and Bray, and to the members of her own family.

As soon as she began to mend, she expressed a strong wish to see her mother and Robert Morgan. She was determined to obtain the former's full permission to an open and honourable engagement to the latter, who had rendered himself so deserving of her, and whom, as her conscience told her in her illness, she had treated with anything but confidence and respect. She desired also to speak with her mother about Simeon's "bank in the balk." Leechy had told her that it was thence her mother had fetched the money which had been handed over to Errton, and which he had designated a rope

around her neck. Hence she was very wishful that the contents of the bank should be all destroyed. Leechy Luty had assured her that the money which Simeon had placed in that bank, and which his parent so carefully guarded—nay, almost worshipped—was all counterfeit; that Simeon had all along known it, but that he had placed it there to quiet his mother, who was ever dogging him to save. She had augured ill of the bank ever since a dream she'd had. Trouble had already come of it, and if not destroyed, she feared it might bring much more. Dinah Sykes huffed her daughter's warnings and advice, and specially scouted the idea of putting away the contents of the bank. Her son, she didn't doubt, would turn out honest and become rich. He was well, and doing well, for they'd had a letter from himself containing that cheering news. He had not told them, however, his whereabouts, for which she commended him. As to an engagement with Robert Morgan, she was of the same mind as she had been from the first. If Hilda was determined to tie herself to him, she might do so, but not a fraction of their property should she ever have; not a meal from their table should the beggar of a scholar ever eat. Hilda saw that her mother and she were so constituted, that it was impossible for them to see and think alike; so she resolved that hour, that henceforth Robert Morgan should be her bosom companion and protector, if he would; her adviser in every strait; the sharer of her secrets; the possessor of her heart. Cheerfully was the offer accepted and the trust received, after Hilda had cleared up a few mysterious passages in the history of their love; and rapidly did she recover strength—happy in the feeling that she had one on whom she could repose, and to whom she could unburden her mind. Hilda cheerfully furnished her uncle and aunt, her cousin and Robert Morgan, with a key to her "ramblings," adding to them the hint thrown out by Luty, that Hand Errton had plotted, and offered to pay for, the burglarious attempt upon the Farmstead. They were by turns astonished and indignant; but agreed that nothing could be done by way of bringing Errton to justice. Luty was not to be found; Simeon was away, with stains upon him which, for the family's sake, it would be better not to expose

to public gaze; and from Errton nothing more was to be feared, as he no longer possessed the instrument by which he had sought and hoped to carry out his wicked designs.

Simultaneously with Hilda's recovery from fever, was the earth's release from the stern reign of Winter. In other words, Spring was affording abundant proof that it had wrested the sceptre from that frosty potentate, and that it had lost none of its power to stud earth's bosom with daisies, and draw from the feathered tribe notes of sweetest music. Winter evidently didn't like to yield the point; for it contended stoutly against the foe, making frequent sorties in the night, which told fatally, in many cases, upon the advanced works of Spring. The latter, however, invariably drove back the enemy during the day, and played with fearful effect upon such icy fortifications as had been thrown up in the darkness.

It became so evident that Spring would, in the end, entirely rout Winter, drive him from all his fastnesses and strongholds, and compel him to beat a hasty retreat to the South Pole, that the company deemed it safe to commence operations. Operations were accordingly commenced. The sod was cut for a large factory and weaving "shed." Cut in the presence of quite a concourse of spectators, who gave utterance to the most contradictory predictions as to its influence on the labour, inhabitants, and welfare of M——. Some didn't doubt that it would entirely ruin the village, by throwing the weavers out of employment, and driving them from their homes; others, that it would be a great benefit to the village, inasmuch as it would employ that labour, and improve those homes. We were much amused, and yet withal instructed, as we mingled that day with that throng. It gradually resolved itself into small groups, that discussed with all earnestness some of the most vital topics. Here, a little asthmatical old man was holding forth, to the best of his ability, on the decadence of England, telling how that in former times food was incredibly cheap, and wages incredibly high; and there, a tall woolcomber was tossing about his bare arms, waxing into fearful rage as he expatiated on the advance of machinery. Here, a pale, starved Lancashire man, a hawker of calico, which he carried in a long

roll under his arm, and who had halted to see the sight and join in the talk, was extolling the resources of the land, and affirming how, on a five-acre system of farms, it might be made to yield fivefold its present produce; and there a barber was letting fly at our system of taxation and national expenditure, animadverting upon the subject with somewhat more of fluency, force, and logic, than many high in authority would have liked. Here, a shoemaker was expatiating on the charter, and ridiculing any attempt to check the growing evils of the times, until political power should be obtained by the masses; and there, a shopkeeper in pretty easy circumstances was growing inconveniently hot on the subject of intemperance, and hinting pretty loudly and honestly, amid derisive laughter, hisses, and cries of, "Does it touch the till, old chap?" that the working man was his own greatest enemy, and a harder taxing tyrant than the state. It happened, however, to be generally agreed that something was wrong, somebody to blame, and that something ought to be done to right it. When men want for food in a land of plenty; when they are willing to labour, and can't obtain work; when they see thousands of uncultivated acres around them, and are ready to put in the spade and throw in the seed, that they may get bread, and yet prevented doing so by another, depend upon it you can't bring them, by any sort of logic or sophistry, to see and say that all is right. You may change their theories on the subject, or respecting the derangement, and dissuade them from particular measures of redress; but there will still remain far down in their minds, so far down that argument will not be able to shake or even touch it, the conviction that something is wrong somewhere; that things are not as Heaven decreed they should be, or as the working man has a right to demand they shall be.

These polemical groups were regarded with different feelings by the "new company." Mr. Sykes, turning the attention of Mr. Bower to them, observed, that there was little chance of any lack of labour, since the village could turn out such a host of partially employed men and women. He thought it was quite clear they were putting down the mill and shed in the right place. Mr. Bray's bird's eyes saw in them a restless,

discontented, and, unless judiciously treated, dangerous class of men, upon whom reliance could hardly be placed in a good time. He apprehended they would be given to "strike." Ben Sparks, proud and prejudiced, who skipped nimbly about with tape and pencil in hand, saw in them a mean, ignorant, groveling herd, who had no higher aim than to eat and drink; no higher destiny than to toil for others' weal.

There was one looker on there, who neither belonged to the company nor the crowd properly speaking, who sauntered about alone, but who also had his thoughts. He was pretty well stricken in years, and wore a tall, new hat, which shimmered again in the sun's rays, but rather a seedy coat, that owned a long back and quite a dangling tail. Underneath this tail he carried his hands, and, with not an atom of presumption in him, walked slowly about, humming an old psalm tune, and glancing askance occasionally, now at the noisy spectators, and now at Ben Sparks's tape and pencil. His seedy appearance was not, however, any matter of necessity; for he had just been furnished with a new suit of black by his son, in honour of the occasion; but, it not being Sunday, he hadn't been able to prevail upon himself to put it on, or indeed any other article of attire intended to be worn with it, excepting the hat already noticed. He answered to the name of Abel Morgan.

"Well," said Abel to himself, as he paced slowly to and fro, "the thing is in a fair way for receiving a trial. I wish it may succeed, and that the village may be again as prosperous as I have known it. I can see, however, that these men reckon it no good. I shall not be surprised if they resolve to overturn the whole thing. Then comes mischief. That Sparks is hot and hasty. Poor men are no better in his sight, I fear, than so many dogs. He'd be for having the soldiers at once, and then somebody in all likelihood is shot. What a pity such matters can't be better managed! It's no use the operative saying he won't tolerate machinery. It's the greatest folly, because he must do it. Nor is it wise in the employer of labour looking as if he couldn't tolerate his hands, and being determined to do all with such a high hand. Oh, how much

more smoothly these things might be done, these improvements introduced, if ye would both be a little considerate! Bear with one another. Ye masters, think how hard it is for a poor man to see the machine brought to his very door, which, he is told, will steal from him his labour and take from his children their bread! Surely he's entitled to a little sympathy, to a little compensation in the shape of help to some other occupation! Surely he oughtn't to be denounced as a leveller and an infidel, when he happens to say to his employer who is trying to do without him, 'Please, sir, what is to become of me if you do my labour by machinery?' And ye workmen, don't ye censure, and ill and harshly judge, all who may avail themselves of the inventions of genius. Ye don't know what an iron, resistless necessity drives some of them on! If ye would calmly reason the thing over with one another, many painful misunderstandings and much bad feeling might be avoided."

There was another spectator of that scene. He didn't enter the field, however. He looked on from his "taking-in room." It was Hand Errton. He was very much interested, at least he said so to a small knot of half-starved weavers, who were waiting for their "turns" in a low, cold, miserable place, containing piles of unsold pieces, and heaps of what at first sight looked like the bleached bones of monstrous animals, but which in reality were "sizing." He declared that the new factory and shed would be the best thing that had ever come to him. His men stared. It would indeed, for he should be able to retire from business, and that he desired very much to do. He wasn't a manufacturer because he liked it, or because he made anything by it. By no means. He made pieces solely for the benefit of the public. He was what was called a patriot. He had made pieces just because he'd felt it his duty to help in clothing the nation, and giving employment to the weavers. With that he told them he should then have done. The nation would be sure to get clothed without either him or his "hands;" so they would be able to make a holiday of the remainder of life. It was a capital thing, and he was surprised his men didn't leap and sing for joy. He'd always thought weavers didn't like to work. Why then weren't they pleased?

Rapidly rose the factory walls on their deep and firm foundations, and carefully, but surely, rose the huge chimney skyward, as if, inheriting the ambition of Babel, it sought to penetrate the clouds and the blue space beyond. They rose, notwithstanding that many curses were hurled at them, and a dark and fearful doom depicted for them. Simultaneously with their growth grew poverty in M——, and angry discontent and noisy agitation. Sunday meetings of the disaffected were held, at which revolution and high treason were openly advocated. The gulf between the middle and working classes yawned wider and wider. The latter became more and more impatient and desperate, partly through the failure of their strikes, the reduction of their wages, and the indifference of the legislature to their rights and wrongs. In the midst of it all, and in spite of it all, the shed and factory grew. By September they were ready for their roofs and windows, and shortly after that, the question came before the "company" of furnishing them with heart and lungs, with muscles and membranes, and breathing into them the breath of life, and converting them, as it were, into living things. And then did Abel Morgan begin to fear. The tug of war, he said to his son, would commence. So long as they had remained empty shells, the weavers and strikesmen hadn't cared much for them. But the moment they began to prepare in real earnest for the work, they would muster to strike them to the earth and tread them out for ever. So fully was he persuaded of this, that he ventured one evening, in presence of the company, modestly to hint at his fears. Mr. Sparks would like to know who durst lift up a menacing finger at the concern. It had come to something if men couldn't do quietly as they liked in a land of liberty and put up what they liked. He'd have a forty-sixer in position in no time if they dared even to bore them with a deputation, and he'd blow them all—into the Red Sea for anything he knew. Abel Morgan observed, that such means had better not be resorted to in case opposition was shown. It would only make them worse. Yes, they should be resorted to, Mr. Sparks replied; and if the old pedagogue headed the rabble, he should be the first to cut a few capers in the air. He'd no idea of being fooled by idiots.



The distrust and apprehension, excitement and ill-feeling, caused by the presence of the new erection, extended to, and took possession of, the Fleece Inn; an inn situated just at the entrance into the village, and the only one within a mile of M——. It was quite in the course of things for the Fleece to be thus possessed. It was generously patronised by hand-loom weavers, being their favourite resort on what were termed by them "taking-in-days;" days so named, because the masters then took in, or received and paid for, the work of the men, and which in the case of such as Errton, were *taking-in-days*, and no mistake, in more senses than one. Here the weavers drank and smoked and talked for six and eight hours at a sitting, to the perfect astonishment and incredible emolument of the landlord, who would laugh right hilariously at their wit, as they threw down their hard-earnings for gin, and rum, and tobacco, and "six-quarter" pipes. Oh, it was such flashing wit in his judgment! "They're a jolly lot of customers, those weavers are," he would say in the bar to Jane. "They storm a little at power-looms to be sure; but it only makes them all the thirstier, so we don't lose anything by it. You must curse machinery, Jane, like a regular trooper, and just drink to the health of the 'Union,' and offer the man a kiss who'll give you the 'sign and the secret,' and you'll be sent in here pretty frequently. Certainly, as they say, this new mill will *mill* us if it get on, and no mistake. It'll knock the breath out of those 'taken-in-days,' and then I wouldn't give a rush for the Fleece. It would just come to this in that case, that the Fleece would be in the humble predicament of *being fleeced*, which would be a rather inglorious turning of the tables; for it has hitherto proved itself a pretty good hand at fleecing the public. However, we must keep up a show of pluck."

One evening about this time, the Fleece was pretty noisy, and Jane was skipping in and out of the bar with a light step, keeping up quite a charming chink of money in the vicinity of the till. On this account, a stranger, who presented himself, and who was instantly and courteously met by the landlord, hesitated after crossing the threshold, as if not decided what to do. He was asked to "walk this way," and shown into a small,

neat room. He wanted a bed, for the night. Oh, the Fleece had lots of beds, and better beds London itself didn't hold. So the stranger had been told. Did he wish to retire at once? No, he thought he shouldn't do that. Would he have a fire? "Why, no," he observed, looking round, "no need to trouble yourself." A considerate stranger certainly. He'd sit with the company an hour. The landlord appeared a little confused. Well, as he liked. He would have to put up with their noises. The Fleece didn't select its own company. Company selected it. It had been the "takin'-in-day," and they were generally rather busy at such times. The stranger said, "Indeed," and asked to be accommodated with a glass of water. The landlord was quite astonished when he tendered money for it, but took it, and observed to Jane in the bar, that they were doing the excise now, for that they were selling pure water. But he didn't believe it would be drunk pure. He'd a notion the stranger was one of those fastidious drinkers who carried their own brandy-bladders. She was to watch if he didn't pour something in. Jane kept an eye upon him, but nothing did he put into his glass. In fact, he took no notice of it. He was busy running over the company. Most of them were weavers, he saw at once; some of whom had with them their wives, and others one or more boys, who nodded heavily at their fathers' elbows, with their noggins of gin before them. Poor lads! the stranger trembled for their morals, and thought they would have been much better in bed.

The topics of the drinkers were "unions," "strikes," and reductions of wages. They told the stranger, evidently expecting to petrify him with astonishment, that the masters had that day pulled them off twopence a score. Some of them were now giving eight and sixpence for thirteen score, forty-twos weft, forty-six gear; and one of the weavers shivered his "six-quarter" pipe into a hundred fragments, by way of expressing his deep indignation. It wasn't to be endured a moment longer, and if the weavers would take his advice, they would throw down, and never pick shuttle again under eighteen-pence a score. Some one bawled out that the weavers would soon be all out of work; for that they were getting

power-loom into the shed like mad; and another answered that he knew they would never be allowed to run there. The stranger inferred from what he heard, that a grand conspiracy to smash all the machinery in the factory and shed was being organised; that the very lives of the masters were in peril; and that there was a strong disposition to oppose every attempt to supersede manual labour by machinery.

As it drew towards ten o'clock, the Fleece grew less boisterous, for the men began to depart in small companies; those who had lads rousing them from their slumbers, and pouring into them noggins of gin, and those who had wives commanding them to seek out and shoulder their "sizing" and "pokes." The stranger submitted a few questions, now that he could be heard. Did they know a person about there of the name of Abel Morgan? Oh yes! He was an old school-master. Hadn't he a son? Yes. Were they well? No one had heard that they weren't. So of course they were. Was he far from where they lived? No, not very. He was much obliged, and seemed disposed to drop the subject. A black heap, or bundle of rags, that had lain crouched in a corner, here stretched itself out after a certain fashion, and made a rather clumsy dash at carrying on the conversation. The stranger recognised it at once, and cut it short by the observation,—

"What, Job! Do you scramble up here sometimes? I wasn't aware you were in that corner."

Whether Job was elated or chagrined, at being thus recognised, he didn't say, but he struck off,—

"O Job! O Job! thou's known far and near,  
From the bonny hill side to the city so dear," &c.

The company, somewhat peremptorily, commanded Job to be silent, observing that they'd had enough of his singing, that evening, to satisfy them for twenty years to come. The landlord apologised to the stranger for having Job in his house, observing, that he pitied him; that he was an inoffensive old man, and so on. The stranger, by way of taking the edge from the company's rather unkind treatment of Job, threw him

a few pence, which he thankfully gathered up, and then quietly betook himself to his corner.

When the stranger left in the morning, Job was there, having slept on the hard hearth all night. The landlord showed his guest the road to the old school-house, his person all smiles and blandishments, from his bald crown, down to the glittering, yellow buttons, and flaunting ribbons, at the knees of his breeches. He wondered much who the stranger could be, and after looking him out of sight, turned in to examine Job on the subject. But the "Patrick" knew nothing of him, and not being ready at invention, could say nothing; so Mr. Grace's greedy curiosity was doomed to lust in vain.

The matter was brought that afternoon, with all due formality, before his bar-mates. But they shook their heads in despair. It was a deep mystery. They hadn't a line long enough to touch the bottom. One of them admitted that it was just possible he might, as Mr. Grace had suggested, be some Indian nabob, who had come from under the sun, laden with riches and in search of an heir. But he wasn't of that opinion. Judging from the description that had been given of him, he should say that he carried a fairer face, and a greater weakness for water, than was usually brought over by sojourners in India. He should rather think that he had something to do with the machinery shop of Sykes and Co. Mr. Grace hoped not. His intention had all along been, never to lodge a limb of that firm. It wasn't his friend. Certainly the mechanics putting together the works, and carters carting them to the spot, had patronised the Fleece. But that wouldn't last for long. No, he wouldn't think so. He owned such a surmise was barely probable, but he commanded it—boxed it—away, as it were, resolved not to entertain it for a moment.

He wasn't under the necessity of sparring with this unwelcome suggestion for more than some twenty-four hours; for the following afternoon, an old patron of the Fleece brought him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It appeared, that having seen a stranger walking about, now with Robert Morgan and Luther, and now with Messrs. Sykes and Bray, he had at once commenced a series of careful inquiries

as to whom, what; and whence he might be, together with a few pointed questions as to his particular business in M——; it being, as Mr. Grace well knew (Mr. Grace signified the same by a few knowing nods), a principle with him never to continue in the dark longer than was absolutely necessary, respecting the most private affairs and aims of any stranger who might happen to put down his foot in the dear old village.

Well, he had found it difficult to get on to any trail for a bit, and when, as he hoped, he had found one, it was nice work winding it the first stage. Fortunately, however, he had stumbled upon Mrs. Lee's servant at the grocer's, where she was giving a large order for goods, intended for some entertainment in honour of the stranger. From that point he had been able to run the trail with ease, and with head quite aloft. To begin at the beginning, his name was Garside; and he wasn't from India, any more than Mr. Grace was from China; but from Oatlands. And it wasn't at all likely that he'd anything to do with the new manufactory; for he was a Dissenting preacher, and nothing more nor less. Mr. Grace was astonished. He'd behaved himself while at the Fleece much more like a gentleman than a man of that stamp. He'd not rated and insulted the company for vile sinners; or thrown fire and brimstone at them; or groaned and rolled up his eyes, as if dying of indigestion; but had sat and talked in a friendly, sober way, like a perfect gentleman. He was a man of common sense that, and he'd go a long mile to hear him preach. Well, so it was, his informant said. And he could tell him how it was that he was then in M——. "When Abel Morgan's son ran away, this man picked him up, and popped him into a good situation, and saved him from ruin; and was, I have been told, very kind to him; so he is now over to see the family, and they're feasting him like mad." Mr Grace saw him often after this, and old Job saw him, for the old hermit lingered many days in and about M——. He saw him at the old school-house, and at the Farmstead, and at Mrs. Lee's. He was very partial to Mrs. Lee's, was Job. Particularly was he partial to Hilda. Ah, Morgan! beware. May be thou hast a rival here! Pooh! how so?

## CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH A BLACK PROVES HIMSELF TO BE EVERY INCH A MAN.

MR. GARSIDE has left M——, much pleased with his visit, and so has Job, not a little enriched by his perambulations. Abel Morgan observes to his son this morning at breakfast, that Mr. Garside's visit has been very opportune, and his staying at the Fleece quite a providential thing. He hopes the firm will take his advice. Robert can't say that they will. They scarcely seem disposed to believe what he has said. They don't doubt that Mr. Garside heard all that he has reported, but they think there may have been a little trifling with him. They found out when he was coming, and so just determined to play a bit of a joke. Besides, they are sure the Fleece would never set itself in opposition to the factory, allowing men to plot and attack upon it under its shelter. Ben Sparks treats the whole thing with supreme contempt. Abel remarks that Ben Sparks is a dangerous man; that his name describes too accurately his nature; and that he fears he will keep the firm in hot water so long as he is connected with it. One unsteady horse may throw an excellent team into disorder; and one injudicious man may derange the plans, and hinder the success, of the best company ever formed. Well, Robert replies, they'll see. They must keep open their eyes and ears, and if it be as Mr. Garside has suggested, they must do the best they can.

Three days pass, and another stranger appears in M——. Whether Mr. Grace's friend, with whom it is quite a principle to find out if possible the business and destination of every stranger, will trouble his head about this man, we really can't say. We suspect not, for the simple reason that he is a black. He is selling tracts, not soliciting alms. He doesn't meet

with much success, however, amongst the weavers, so he turns into the road leading to the new works of Sykes and Co. He has entered the yard, where all is bustle, for they're unloading some machinery, and stares around, as if perfectly bewildered. He hears some one say,—

"There, that nigger's *capt*, anyhow, this whet. How there, blacky! you'll beat concerns like this quite hollow in Africa!"

There's a loud laugh, poor blacky stares and stumbles so. He blunders into the shed, where there is a most deafening clatter of hammers. They're putting together some looms.

"Holloa there! what do you want? Come, get away. We can't afford either to give or have anything stolen."

This is Mr. Sparks. He doesn't move though, for he sees another person approach, and waits as if to hear what he has to say. Mr. Sykes comes up, and speaks to him kindly. The poor run-away slave, as he supposes he must be, offers him a tract, which he waives away, giving him money, however, with the other hand. He departs, and turns his face in the direction of Springhead. He meets a couple of boys, who call out after him,—

"Old chap! tha may turn back! tha'll get nowt there!"

He pushes on, however. He looks about for the kitchen door, and having found it, knocks. Again he knocks. At length it opens, and before he can speak, a female says, in a snappish way,—

"Nay, we've nothing to spare here but bad tempers." He holds out a tract. "No, we don't want any. Be off, or I'll set the dog on you. Are you off?"

She is just closing the door, when a strong voice is audible to blacky. He hears it say,—

"Stay, Jane! I thought I saw something rather shady pass the window. Let's have a look. Well, Mr. Ebony, where art thou from?"

"States, sir. Slave."

"Certainly," Mr. Errton observes, in a sort of musing undertone; "thou hast the colour of a slave, and a woolly head, but thy lips and nose don't seem just the thing. But that admits of explanation. And what now," he speaks up, "may be thy

real business in this country?" He doesn't speak, but offers him a tract. "Nay, nay, thou must allow me to decline touching that. Are they religious tracts?" Blacky nods and grins. "See here, Jane. This fellow is missioning this country, as our men do the Indies. And, by Jove! there's need for it. Dost thou travel a deal?" Blacky nods again. Mr. Errton goes on. "Thou talks very sparingly. I certainly like that, but thou art not the man for me. Here, I'll give thee a penny for thy pains, and see that thou gets clear of the place in no time, and don't leave any infection behind."

Errton turns in, and blacky moves off. He wanders about until dusk, when he turns into the Fleece. There are only three men present. He sits down and orders beer. They look at him, but don't speak. After a short silence, he observes,—

"Times bad here."

"No doubt of that," one of the men replies. "Are ye from America?" He nods, just as he lifts his pint to his lips.

"Slave, may be?"

"Was once; but dis nigger no more slave. Free as ye be, now."

"We free!" a second man observes, tossing back his head. "We're worse nor ye wur when working i' irons."

"Fools den. Me'd be free, or me'd try. Do as we do when can."

"How's that? What do ye do?"

"See! we send someting out ob such as dese into mas'rs' heads." He bares a belt in which are two pistols. The men look curiously at blacky's deadly weapons, and then burst out laughing, one of them exclaiming,—

"Capital! He's pluck, has the old chap. Have ye ever shot anybody, now?"

"Oh! me not say. Me don't talk, me act."

"That's the way," one of the men says. He appears in an ill humour. "What's the use of jabbering so much? Up and at it. That's the way."

"Certainly de way," blacky replies.

The Fleece begins now to be busy, which interrupts a conversation that the men appeared rather to relish, and which



the black stranger didn't dislike. He observes, that amongst those who come stalking in, are many tall, bony, surly-looking fellows, who pass through into another room. Mr. Grace regards them with an uneasy look, as though they weren't just the company he should most prefer. At length the men, with whom the stranger has been so friendly, rise and follow these arrivals. They are absent for more than an hour, when two of them return, and ask Mr. Ebony to accompany them upstairs. They usher him into a long room containing company. He is requested to take a seat. He feels that he is being severely scrutinised, but he's resolved to stand the ordeal. A respectable-looking man, seated at the table, speaks. He observes, that he'll no doubt think it rather strange, their sending for him in the way they had done. But he'll come to the point at once, and say, that they had been given to understand that he was a hater of tyrants and tyranny, and that he carried upon his person the means of showing it in a practical manner. He tells blacky, with very solemn emphasis, that they're a secret society, pledged on oath to be the death of all oppressors, and that if he likes he may become one of them; but that whether he accepts this offer to receive him or not, he must never divulge what he there sees and hears. He grins, and says, no, he won't. One of the tall, bony, surly-looking fraternity stalks across the room, and whispers with a considerable hiss to one of his brethren. The two now look fixedly at the stranger, who watches them askance with deep interest; observing which, the speaker turns round his eyes to ascertain what is going on. "Order," some one calls out, and the speaker proceeds. The stranger is asked if he knows anything of certain parties and movements. Oh yes, he does. It comes out that he is really one of them, and may be trusted with any secret. They wish to ask a favour. Will he join a gang that is being formed to demolish some machinery near where they are? A factory and shed are being fitted up near to M——, the latter of which, if not stopped, will ruin the hand-loom weavers in that part. Men who don't live at the place must of course be selected, or it would be serious. The weavers there are paying into a "defence fund;" so that there will be a

chance of counsel, if one should happen to get apprehended. Yes, he'll form one. He's a brave fellow, they all say, and if he'll promise to meet one of their men to-morrow at the Fleece, about ten o'clock, when he'll get further instruction, they'll set him at liberty for the present. Oh, he'll do that too. They say he's a jolly fellow, in reply to which he grins them a "good-night," and descends. Arrived down stairs, he calls for a glass of brandy, and, without diluting it, much to Mr. Grace's astonishment and chagrin, gulps it down, and then departs. The landlord expresses an opinion to the effect, that his throat must be lined with sheet-iron. Any tube, coated with anything less tender, would have smarted as such a fiery fluid ran through it. May be it does smart, but the stranger being in such haste, doesn't feel, or care for it.

He is soon through M——, and at the old school-house. He knocks, and Lucy promptly answers the door. But when she sees him, she starts back with a shriek. Old Abel comes. What does he want? To speak to school-mas'r, if alone. He's alone, excepting his daughter, but suggests to-morrow. No; he must see him and talk then. He just steps up and whispers in Abel's ear. "The school-mas'r" is surprised. The stranger is asked in, and Lucy is desired to withdraw. He prefaces his communication by a few observations as to its importance, Abel all the while staring at him with all his might. The shed is to be attacked some night soon, and all the looms shivered. He has it on good authority, and has come to tell Abel that he may apprise the company. To-morrow night he learns all particulars. It's just possible it may *be* to-morrow night. Will Abel dissuade the company from pooh-poohing it? He won't stay any longer. Yes, to a little supper? No, not to a bite. He shall get his bed and bite at the same place. Abel thanks him, and promises to lose no time. Again they don't know what to think, say, or do, those owners of this unpopular shed.

They discuss the thing over at the Farmstead this morning.

"Shall we send for the military?" Luther says, after different suggestions have been offered.

"Send for the devil," Ben Sparks replies.

"No need to do that," Luther rejoins. "He's here already, and pretty active, if I know anything."

"Well, then, let's not have the redcoats besides. It appears to me to be making ten times too much of them, to be sitting in such solemn deliberation as this. Depend upon it, there will be nothing to it. Those chicken-hearted weavers won't come. I know they won't."

Mr. Sykes observes, that he fears they may make a brush, for that the feeling against power-looms, he has found, is very strong. Bray is of the same opinion. He was astonished the other day to find himself shouted at as he passed through M—, on account of his being one of the firm. It was a straw which showed him the direction of the wind. Mr. Sparks sees nothing remarkable in the fact of their friend Bray having been shouted at. Such a thing, he thinks, is likely to occur rather often. He certainly isn't disposed to regard it as an expression of ill-feeling towards the firm. Mr. Sykes observes, that in his opinion the crisis is one that calls for gravity, and he will be obliged to gentlemen to be grave. Bower seconds that, but is reminded by Sparks that it isn't a motion. Well, they agree in the end that circumstances warrant a patrol for a few nights, and that it might not be amiss for two or more of them to sleep on the premises for a week. Sparks observes that it would be a pretty long nap, but adds, that he'll form one with pleasure. He suggests that the patrol should be well armed, and the sleepers likewise; and that the latter would do well to keep awake into the small hours, as these precautionary and alarmist measures will be sure to provoke some little annoyance. He'll brush up his musket and replenish his powder-horn at once, and be ready for action in the evening.

Evening has come, and also ten o'clock, and with that hour the black stranger appears at the Fleece. He hasn't sat five minutes, ere a tall, bony, surly-looking man beckons him out. He supposes he's aware what he's wanted for, so he'd best come on. It is very, very dark—pitch dark. They are soon clear of the houses, and the stranger's conductor, having commanded, rather than asked, the former to halt a minute, does something. The black thinks he must be putting on a

mask. He's right, for when they're fairly started again, the masked man says,—

"That'll do. I'm now all right. You carry your disguise in your skin. We put ours on."

It is still pitch dark ; so dark that the masked man declares he doesn't know if they've crossed a certain bridge. He feels about with his feet, and beats the wall with a heavy stick.

"Ah, it's here. You'll have to mount now. Dang it, don't you talk?" the man asks.

"Me act, not talk."

"Well, then, see you *do* act. Only wait for the proper hour. I hope you've not your pistols in your hand. If so, put 'em up, for some of those bushes may play mischief otherwise." Blacky grins, but it being so very dark, his guide can't see him. "I'm aiming for an old hut up here, where I expect we shall meet company. It used to be occupied by a queer old stick of the name of Leechy Luty, who's now—God knows where he is."

Blacky grins from ear to ear, and sticks most pertinaciously to his practice of not talking. They tug at it right bravely, now climbing the breast of a rock, and now wading the middle of a "win;" now diving into a watercourse, and now tumbling over a hillock.

"I must be lost," the masked man peevishly observes. "How those boughs do pull? Come, we're nearing the top, and here is a bit of road. There, we shall do. Now you just have a care to what I'm going to say. You must mind your points up here, or you're shot in a twinkling. Just as we enter this hole on the top, you'll be challenged by a big, desperate fellow, who'll refuse you admission if you don't answer properly. Follow me, and do as I say. Just nip the nape of his neck, and say, distinctly and firmly, 'God speed mauls and muskets!' He'll know what it means, and you'll pass on. Then when we join the muster, you'll be expected to do something else. You'll see a figure wearing a mask with horns. He's our captain. You must go to him and say, 'Hail, Captain!' and show your pistols. Now if you don't mind these instructions, you may be a dead man before I can explain."

They enter poor Leechy's hut. There's a strong smell of earth, and mould, and confined air. Behind the old door is the sentinel, just visible in the dull light of a small candle. The stranger gives him a nip and mutters something, and is allowed to pass. He observes that he is masked. They enter what was Luty's small room. Here are eighteen or twenty strong fellows, wearing most ugly masks. The horned leader receives his honours. The stranger looks round and feels rather timid, the company or muster appears so fierce and formidable. Ten of them have large "mauls," the rest muskets and other weapons of warfare.

The captain proceeds to address them.

"All's ready," he says, "excepting one of the guides. He must be sought up, however. You are all aware, I trust, that we attack to-night. Our plan is, to leave here at once. We then go direct to the shed, and if all is right, force an entrance. The men with the mauls will then break the looms, whilst we with fire arms keep watch at the gates. Now mind, not an atom of anything is stolen, nor anything belonging to the spinning concern injured. Let's let them see that it's only those power-looms we will not tolerate. Now, lads, what will you do?"

Here the men with heavy hammers hold them above their heads, as if about to smash everything in the room, whilst those with muskets shoulder them, by way of signifying their preparedness for action.

"That will do," the horned gentleman observes. "And now about this other guide. He must be sought up. If he's either cowardly or treacherous, we must know and render him harmless."

There is a consultation. Who knows him? The captain's second, some one says. That'll do, for he's to be trusted. The captain's second is the big man who's conducted the stranger up the Roughs. He'll go if he may have the black with him; so it is agreed that he may, and the two return. He tells the stranger that they are off to seek up a man who lives in M—, and who was to have been on the Roughs before them. He had consented to be with them that night, and to act as a guide,

seeing the smashers were all unacquainted with that part of the country. "I trust," he went on, "he's not running thin, for he's been a great talker in his time. He's been a foreman in the 'Union,' and has twice been employed as 'Jack Strike.' But great talkers don't do much, in a general way, hang 'em, and hence I shall not be surprised if he's cut."

M—— is very quiet. They pass the Farmstead. The big, masked man, looks up at the house, for they don't find it so dark now, and remarks, that he believes one of the makers of all this mischief lives there. They turn into a square. "Let me see, I'm lost. Oh, here it is. This door is it. If it were light, you would see that it is painted green. That means that he's a radical." He taps. No. Nothing to it. He knocks. Same result. Now he shakes it. No. He now kicks it. "D—— him, he's off, like a scared crow. Halloo!" A head appears at one of the upstairs windows, and a female voice says,—

"Who is there, please?"

"Is John in?" the man asks.

"Of course he's in, but he's very poorly."

"Oh, indeed," the man replies. "Open the door and let me see him."

"Won't it do in the morning?"

"Do you hear what I say, woman? Obey at once, or in the name of thunder I'll burst in."

"Be off with your impudence."

"Not until I've seen John."

A voice speaks within, and the woman draws back her head. It reappears, and she says,—

"If I let you in, won't you press to see him?"

"Come, be quick," is the man's curt answer. In a few minutes the door opens. They walk in, and behold a wretched scene; a loom, a few chairs, an old table covered with potato peelings, broken spoons, and such litter, together with a "bobbin-wheel" and a couple of stools, are all the furniture they can see.

"Where is he?" The woman trembles from head to foot, and can scarcely reply. At length she gets off,—

"For God's sake what do you want? Oh! what, what is the meaning of this?"

"Woman, don't jabber. We'll do you no harm. We'd need not, and look round. You've had harm enough done you, without doubt. Let us see John."

Petrified with terror, she conducts them upstairs. They pass a straw bed on the floor, where are three sleeping children, whose cold arms and legs are but scantily covered by a few old sacks and rags. The man points to them as he strides past, and says feelingly, "I wonder whose arm wouldn't be nerved by that sight?" They come to another bed. A man is there, and an infant, feeling for the mother who stands trembling there with the light. The man is very pale, and has something like the clammy sweat of death on his face. His masked visitor, resting the butt-end of a musket on his bed, says with a firm tone,—

"John, how is this? We calculated you were to be trusted above all men, and you serve us thus! How is it, I say?"

"Oh, I'm very poorly," John replies, and rolls over.

"Damn it, if it wasn't for this woman and yon bairns, I'd shoot thee as dead as a herring, that I would. It's all cowardice or else treachery. Up, I say, in an instant!" John looks perfectly bewildered. "What thinkest thou now of all thy fine speeches? Shame upon thee, to try to sneak out when it comes to a point, by this dodge!" John musters courage to reply that he was never for it.

"Never for it!" the masked man contemptuously remarks. "Old Judas! but we'll let out thy bowels for thee some day, if thou takes up that song. That we will."

"Never for what?" the trembling woman asks. "What is it all about. John, tell me."

"Ay, tell her, great talker. Come, up in an instant, or I'll blind that baby with thy brains." This allusion to the child, which is running its tiny hands over the greasy pillow in search of its mother, stirs up all the latent wrath and courage in her frame. She says, boldly and emphatically,—

"He shan't!"

"Shan't what, woman?"

"He shan't get up. He's poorly, and has been taking medicine."

"Hold that clapper of thine this instant. This isn't a moment when we shall be likely to brook thy impertinence. John, is this manly? Is this what we were led by thy speeches to expect? Thou wast a leading man in the 'Union,' and when that gave signs of weakness, thou recommended intimidation of masters. Thou professest, too, to be a Chartist—though I've no confidence in that party—and hast lectured amongst them. And yet when it comes to a point, thou feigns sickness, and thus deserts thy colours. Shame, shame! And what wilt thou get for it? Nothing but execration. Oh, John, dost thou care so little for those children, that thou'lt tamely submit to have power-looms brought to thy door, mocking, by their cursed clatter, thy children's cries for bread? Wilt thou tamely submit to the introduction of a state of things that will bring thee nothing but starvation? A state of things under which thou'lt become a hated pauper, thy ability to labour a worse than useless gift, thy very existence a nuisance, an eyesore, under which thy wife and children will be doomed to beg in cold and rags, or die as vermin die, to beg of those whom thou hast enriched by thy toil, receiving only a haughty dismissal, or a torrent of vile abuse, the very yard-dog encouraged to strain his tether in his eagerness to worry the trembling group? Wilt thou, who hast said so much, who hast so savagely denounced oppressors, quietly allow them to put round thy neck such a galling chain? a chain that will drag thee down into the darkest, deepest, awfulest pit of wretchedness and despair that outcast ever died in! John, arise! Don't court such a fate for thy wife and little ones! Don't expose thyself to the stinging reproach of having, in a cowardly mood, voluntarily sold thy family to want! Don't now!"

John seems very uneasy; and unable longer to endure this, raises himself up. He has a most ghastly appearance, observing which, his wife fears that something serious may happen if he should be forced out of the house; so she steps in between



him and the masked visitor, and vows that he shan't leave his bed. The man declares he'll strike her if she doesn't get out of the way. Well, he may, but that won't break her resolution. The baby begins to cry, and the other children catching the infection also let off, so that there is a pretty chorus altogether. The man, irritated by this unfortunate squall, pushes away the woman with great rudeness, and the black man's hand nervously touches his pistols. Instantly she regains her place beside her terrified husband, but is the next minute swung across the room, and lights with a shriek on the children's bed. Quick as thought, blacky springs forward and snatches the musket from the woman's powerful assailant, and warns him that he'll shoot in an instant if he doesn't desist. "Me act, not talk." The man stands for a few seconds perfectly motionless; and no doubt, could we see his face, there is in it a very large proportion of amazement. It is but for a few seconds, however, for now he falls upon the black, and they close in terrible combat. It is a strange scene for a midnight hour. The children screaming, the mother rushing in frantic haste to rescue the infant, the father bounding with it out of bed, in such open contradiction of his protestations of indisposition, and the men rolling over with all the ferocity of tigers, grappling to lay hold of each others' vitals, and prostrate each other on the floor in death. Now they groan and struggle, and now the stock of the musket snaps; now they are still for a second, and now the man who was disguised, and who in the contest has had the ascendancy, rises, extinguishes the light by a dexterous throw of his broken mask, and hurries with the utmost despatch from the house. The candle is re-lit without delay, that the condition of their deliverer may be investigated. He mutters that he's not hurt. But he can't rise. He's fastened down. "Ah," John observes, "here's the cause." The man's pinned to the floor by a large clasp-knife. It has passed through his coat, waistcoat, and shirt, and entered a thin seam in the boards, just missing his heart, but cutting the skin. "There, man," John says, as he pulls at the knife, "this was intended for your heart. There's no doubt you've had a narrow escape as well as me. The rascal! to do

this to a poor foreigner." The black man rises to his feet and shakes himself. John's wife asks if they can do anything for him. He shakes his head. She hopes he'll keep out of the way of the villain, and expresses an opinion that her husband has had a broad hint that it is quite time to change his ways. He's thought of doing that, he replies, and looks fixedly at the stranger. The latter, just glancing at his pistols, bids them good night, and turns out into the darkness.

John and his wife, after quieting the children, lie down, but can't sleep, they are so excited. So they converse. The wife is sorry the man put out the light when he'd lost his mask. Hadn't he done so, she'd have tried to have him taken. John thinks it's best as it is. His thoughts run more on the black than the masked man. He wonders who he can be. He's not a real black, he thinks. His face hasn't the form of one, and his skin under his clothes isn't black, for he saw it when pulling out the knife. It's very strange that a man of that stamp, and in such disguise, should befriend him. Wait, John, and you'll get it. This mysterious man hastens in the direction of what is now known as Sykes's Mill. Now he runs, and now he halts to listen. Three men are outside the mill gates. They are an armed patrol. They ask who's there, and what's his business. He calls out, "Hold! a friend." They draw together and bid him advance. He's come to tell them that a band of desperate fellows is on its way to the mill, with the intention of destroying the power-looms. They're a second race of Luddites, and he'd advise the patrol to give an alarm. One of them says he'll just run into the shed and tell the masters. But the others daren't be left, so they all off. They meet Ben Sparks in a regular rage.

"What's to do? Why are you running?"

"Oh, they're coming, sir, they're coming!"

"Then go back and blow into 'em. What in the world have you been engaged for else?"

"But they're armed like Luddites. We shall have no chance."

"Who says so? Who's seen 'em?"

"This man. Hadn't we best run for assistance?"

"And let the rascals have it all their own way! Nay, nay, we must show game."

The other masters have appeared. Mr. Sykes calls in the black, and suggests that the men had best return to their posts. They question him closely. His statement is straightforward enough. Mr. Sparks distrusts the man, and says that it is a tissue of falsehoods. Robert Morgan, forgetting himself, declares that it is as probable as anything Benjamin Sparks ever said. Ben thanks him, and says that Morgan's wish is father to his thought. He is nothing more than a low-bred radical and leveller, and so is his father; and he has all along suspected that their sympathies were with the class to whom those men belong. The old pedagogue ought to have swung, was to have swung, when so many of those Luddites were hung. Robert is exasperated, and is beginning to reply, but Mr. Sykes interposes, and commands them to be silent for two fools, and drop their child's play. He is quite white with indignation, and can't stand still. He wishes a stone of the factory had never been laid, and that all the machinery was at Jericho. He should like to know who those villains are who are so reckless and—

"See, see," Mr. Bray says, "yonder they are! We are dead men in ten minutes if they get in."

They look, and can just discern a black mass at the yard gates. They are apparently in consultation.

"Why, where in the world is the patrol?" Ben Sparks asks. "Overpowered, I'll be bound, and disarmed. What cowards! Well, if this isn't a kettle of fish, there never was one!"

"Something must now be done, however," Mr. Sykes observes. "I wish to God we'd believed this and been better prepared."

"Oh, don't begin wishing now, man," is Sparks's reply. "Do something. I know what I'll do. I'll shoot the first man who enters the yard."

"Don't act hastily, Benjamin. If you do let fly, let it be to scare, not to kill."

"I'll take aim as near the heart as possible, William; I'll do that. And if any of you try to be a hair's breadth wide of that mark, you forfeit all right to the name of men."

"Shall I remonstrate with them, think you?"

"And receive back the contents of one of the rascal's muskets in reply! I'd as soon go and take the end of one of their muzzles in my mouth, as put out my head to talk. Don't court death, Sykes. It is—"

Mr. Sparks pauses, for the mass moves. The gates swing open, and all is so still within, that the masters can hear the creaking of their iron hinges. Four dark figures step into the gateway, and then halt. They wait apparently for the others to follow. They don't do so. Now they beckon. No. There is no movement. The figures have mauls thrown over their shoulders.

"Ah," Mr. Sparks observes, "see that. The courage of the fellows is failing. Our fun is going to be spoiled. By George, I'll bring down one of those black scamps. Just allow me, Bray, to aim from your window."

"No—no—no," says Mr. Sykes. "Allow me; I'll speak to them." They all say, nonsense, he'll be shot. But instantly his mouth is at an open pane, and his voice ringing in the stillness. They're right, however, to some extent, for in less than half a minute the flash of half-a-dozen muskets bursts upon the darkness, and their contents whistle through the air.

"Now for it!" Sparks exclaims, and bang goes his piece. Another and another follow, and the black mass dissolves in the darkness, and flies in terror from the scene. Something, however, is on the ground. "Three men are shot," some one says. "No," the black says, "they will be the patrol." He offers to go to ascertain it. There are the three men, unhurt, but tightly pinioned and bandaged. They had been suddenly seized, and threatened with death, in case they refused to lie quietly down. They had been able to do good service, however, by making the men believe that the mill contained a strong force of military.

At daylight the masters return to their homes, and blacky puts up with Abel Morgan. He has a long chat with Robert and his father about the incidents and adventures of the preceding night. He seems pleased that he has been able to serve the firm.

He is entertained the following evening at Mrs. Lee's. He

has a private interview with Hilda. She seems almost fond of him, and talks with much ease and freedom. Job is mentioned by them. He tells her how that he had employed Job to collect for him correct information respecting the village, herself, and others; and how that Job had picked up hints about a meditated attack upon Sykes's mill. Learning this, he had come to apprise the firm, and to render them such help as he might be able. He must now leave them. He thinks it will be best for him to return under cover of night. Hilda gives him a small Testament as a token of affection and gratitude, for he will not accept of money, and whispers something about her love to some one. All shake the black hand of Mr. Ebony very heartily, and he departs; but it is pressed by affection for the last time. Morning comes, and with it a report that a black man has been found in a ditch horribly murdered. Many hasten to the scene of the foul deed, Luther and Robert amongst them. It is blacky; his throat is cut, and his head and arms much bruised. The constable arrives, and the body is rolled over. A Testament is found next to his heart, and on the ground there is a sponge, with which the face has been partly washed, apparently to test its colour. Poor Leechy Luty! thou hast paid dearly for the daring part thou hast acted!

## CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH IT WILL BE SEEN THAT MR. SPARKS SPEAKS THE TRUTH.

AY, it was Luty, and the young men didn't doubt that his murderer was the masked man who had attempted to stab him. Leechy had mentioned to them his midnight encounter at John's; and it appeared to them highly probable that this, coupled with his disappearance at the hour of attack, had created the suspicion that he must be a spy. Hence he had been watched, and visited with speedy and summary vengeance. The members of the firm were sad, as they had intended rewarding him in some handsome manner for his conduct. It had taken them by surprise. It wasn't what they had expected from this half-civilised wretch. They had reckoned him amongst the disaffected—the most disaffected. His hut on the Roughs, some of them knew, had been quite a notorious rendezvous for the “strike men” and others. Then he had been the slave and tool of Errton, one of the fiercest haters of Sykes and Co. Hence it was an unaccountable change to most of those acquainted with it, excepting Abel Morgan.

It was obvious enough, Abel said, how it had been produced. The man had latterly taken to reading and thinking; thereby his mind had been quickened. He had happened to stumble—for it had been more accident than anything else—upon good books, thereby stirring up the better part of his nature; for he held that he'd all along had one. He'd presented a rough, odd, unattractive exterior, he knew. But that exterior, as was often the case, had covered many excellent capabilities, just as the hard, rugged rock, sometimes holds in its heart the most precious metal. Abel looked upon it as another illustration of

what they might hope for from the diffusion of a sound literature. He didn't doubt that there were many dormant germs of goodness in M——, that only waited for the kind culture of right books, to cause them to grow up, blush with blossom, and bend with fruit.

It is interesting to observe, how small a proportion of the truth, respecting many things and events, is confided to the custody of general society. Especially how little really gets into daylight, of that which *we* know has transpired in the dark. The untold, there can be no doubt, is always vastly in excess of the reported. The real circumstances connected with the attack upon Sykes's mill; the previous meeting on the Roughs; the visit to the invalid's, and the fierce struggle in which it issued, together with the real cause of the murder of Leechy Luty, never got into the full swing of a regular circulation. The public, meaning by that term the inhabitants of M—— and the locality generally, picked up, of course, a fragment here and a fragment there, and these, after being beaten out like gold-leaf, were passed from hand to hand, with such accretions as wayward fancies and mischievous propensities rarely omit, in such cases, to add. But more than such fragments the public did not obtain. With the real facts of the case they were never made fully acquainted. Into the inner sanctuary of the true secret they did not penetrate; but crowded the outer court, where floated the vaguest rumours.

The firm lost no time, nor was expense spared, in endeavouring to get on to the track of the authors and perpetrators of the daring attempt to destroy their property. But not a clue could they lay hold upon. Sly, shrewd, expert spies, were set to work, who inquired diligently into the whereabouts, on that memorable night, of such suspicious characters as M—— contained; who frequented the Fleece at all hours, and tried to wheedle themselves into the confidence of the weavers resorting thither; who sought out old Job, but only to be disappointed by the perfect dearth of information he exhibited; who ensconced themselves on the Roughs, to observe what might pass there; and who scoured a circuit of country, miles in diameter, collecting what could be to them of no earthly use

whatever, in solving the problem they had on hand. Nowhere was a clue to be found; not under the roof of the most wretched, or at the gathering place of the most disaffected. The wildest vagaries of the intoxicated didn't afford one; nor could fawning, tattling, would-be informants, say where such a thing dwelt. It was clear that the attack had been planned, and, so far as it proceeded, had been managed, with consummate skill; and that the guilty kept their secret with most provoking fidelity; consequently no particular result was obtained by these investigations, unless we are to regard as one the fact, that the shed and factory were henceforward unmolested. For they did continue unmolested, and in the enjoyment of this, their rightful quiet, they were soon ready to commence their noisy career, and put to the test the judgment and business capacities of their owners.

Of course, when the "project" had reached this stage in its development, there was a grand public dinner in the long room; not such an affair as we have at this day on like occasions, but what was considered magnificent, and *was* magnificent, viewed in relation to M——, and the unassuming character of the firm. After the dinner came speeches, some of them maiden speeches, delivered with no lack of stammering, and, if appearances go for anything, no small amount of agony, although the orators would persist, their faces all the while flatly contradicting their words, in declaring that the happiest moment of their lives. Luther and Robert only broke down about a dozen times each; the others not so often. The speeches were of varied interest, and touched upon a diversity of topics.

Mr. Bray's was rather full of his "honoured friends" and "the present assembly," upon whom, he declared, he couldn't look without a feeling of pride—an emotion that so seldom occupied his bosom, that he must needs speak of it.

Mr. Bower didn't allude to the assembly, nor did he look at it whilst on his feet, but looked—right into deep darkness for anything we know, for he kept his eyes most closely curtailed during his few minutes' misery.

Mr. Sparks looked at the past, and animadverted upon the



bad feeling that had been, in various farms, displayed against the firm. The working classes, in his opinion, ought to be sold into slavery for a twelvemonth. They would then be able to appreciate their many liberties and privileges. They wouldn't bawl out so against machinery and its use by masters. Where were there serfs so well off as the operative in England? Let the operative compare his condition with such. For he maintained that it was with the serfs he ought to compare, and not the higher classes. He would find that he was allowed a hundred liberties denied to them. He was aware that the working classes were clamouring very vociferously for what they called their rights. It was all a cursed delusion. What right had they in Parliament, or to the least control over the conduct of public affairs? None whatever; and he wished it to be understood, that should he come into that part to reside, he should set his face like a flint against all agitation for such things.

Mr. Sykes looked, or rather tried to look, into the future. Better times, he thought, were coming. He didn't at all agree with their friend Mr. Sparks. The operative classes had rights, as well as others; and he would be the last to trample knowingly upon them. He expressed himself as grieved that their introduction of power-looms had been opposed in the way it had been; as confident that they would yet be hailed as a good; as quite sanguine that the factory and shed would prove a complete success, if the villagers would co-operate, which they ought to do; and as of opinion that Abel Morgan, the old schoolmaster, was a most extraordinary man, the expression of which opinion not merely threw Abel into a fearful perspiration, and set him rubbing his broad forehead until it wellnigh bled, but excited here and there a ludicrous inquiry, as to the relevance of the observation.

The villagers certainly co-operated with the firm, if seeking for employment under the firm may be considered co-operation. As "hands" were wanted for the spinning frames, "hands" offered and were engaged, and taught how to manage threads and spindles. As weavers were wanted for the looms, young females offered and were engaged. "Dozens" hadn't to

wait for combers, nor had combers to wait long for "dozens." In fact, all the available labour of M—— was soon swallowed up by Sykes's mill, and the voracious monster wanted more. This put a new face on to things, and caused the people to smile, especially as it became noised abroad what fabulous wages the "steamers" were likely to make, after learning thoroughly how to manage their looms. The village began to appear as if improving in circumstances, and to speak as if improving in temper. Masons here found work, for the erection of shops and cottages was soon vigorously commenced. Shoemakers and tailors began to be regularly "pent." Hucksters picked it out that it was profitable to raise their cry in M——, and the vendor of more costly wares was frequently seen gliding in and out of the cottages, with the cheerful smile that indicates the driving of a lucrative trade. On every side there were signs of bustle and business, of purpose and energy, of altering circumstances, and growing plenty. The mill was fast becoming a favourite. To the "steamers," it gave promise of being a sort of mine. The masters too were liked, with one exception. The exception was Ben Sparks. He was no favourite, for he was proud and haughty. The females he despised, the men he couldn't endure. The other members of the firm regretted his connection with it, and were not without hopes that he might withdraw, as his brother had done. It was clear he wasn't adapted to business, or at any rate, qualified to manage "hands." However, he didn't live on the spot, or very near, so that they had the benefit of that counterbalancing circumstance. Altogether, they were pretty well satisfied with the success realised by Christmas, and the prospects they then had. Mr. Sykes was not barely satisfied, he was highly gratified; and at a meeting of the firm, held at the Farmstead the day after Christmas day, he said very emphatically, that he *was* highly gratified, and added, that with one more idea carried out, he should be really happy.

"Which would be what nobody has ever yet been," Ben Sparks observed. "I should very much like to know, Mr. Sykes, what this idea is, and where the place may be to which it will be necessary to carry it, in order to bring about such a

desirable consummation as your being really happy? I'm sure I'll do my best to drag it thither."

William Sykes deemed it best not to reply, as Ben seemed disposed to trifle; so he just placed his left hand softly on his head, and looked at Mr. Bower, who was seated on the opposite side of the fire, smoking. That gentleman, supposing he was expected to come to the help of his friend of the Farmstead, unfortunately replied,—

"You *will* misunderstand one, Sparks. There is a most hateful perversion about you. Our friend doesn't mean that he has any idea that he would have carried out literally. But—"

"Not bundled out, you think, Bower, by its horns and hoofs? I see."

Mr. Bray wasn't pleased with this trifling, so he thought he'd just turn a laugh on to their vivacious friend.

"You don't suppose ideas have horns and hoofs, do you?"

"Yes, I do, Bray. Hasn't your idea of a cow those appendages? And I know ideas that have ears and heels. Rather long ears too, as you ought to know, seeing you've been named after one of their notorious instincts."

"Sparks!" Luther put in, with much more of haste than discretion, "You drop this small talk. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for bantering men in this disgraceful way, who are so much your seniors. You shall not do it here. We don't meet to spend our time in listening to your blundering attempts at wit."

Ben didn't reply to this except by a glance. But in so far as a glance can give a reply, it was a withering one.

"Come, come," Mr. Sykes observed, "let us not be so unwise as to quarrel. I can state in few words what I meant by my clumsy expression. I look upon it, friends, that employers of labour have great responsibilities. That they owe much to their 'hands.' Much more than the wages the 'hands' earn. They should provide means, if such be not already in existence, for the moral improvement and religious welfare of their work-people. I think this duty presses on us with peculiar weight. We are drawing together a large mass of human beings; some

of them, it may be, from neighbourhoods well furnished with those means. And yet there is here but the scantiest provision for their moral and religious improvement. There is not a *settled* minister in the village. Now, what I meant was, that if we could find a suitable man, and fix him here—a man who would take the care of those matters—who would preach and visit from house to house, I should be very much pleased indeed, and should feel that we were not neglecting our duties. What say you?"

There was silence. At length Mr. Sparks spoke.

"Do you expect me to give an opinion, Mr. Sykes?"

"Of course! Why not?"

"Oh, I didn't know whether I shouldn't be considered as bantering you, and so be instantly expelled from the house. Well, I've just to say that I decidedly object to the firm, as a firm, attempting anything of the sort. In fact, we couldn't do it, because I'm Church out and out. As to you, in your individual capacities, seeking out a good man to look after the moral and religious welfare of the people, I've nothing to object. Although I would say, if Luther won't knock me down, that you'll have to travel far before you meet with a man who'll be likely to care half so much for the people's morals as the people's money. Such men aren't abroad every day."

"That's an old song," Mr. Bray remarked, "which men stupidly persist in singing, notwithstanding that every day falsifies it a hundred times over. The difficulty with me in this matter—for I've thought about it a great deal—is finding, not a true, right-hearted man, but a man suited to the place and the times."

"The question of suitability is something, of course. Well, now, Mr. Bray, about this said suitability. If Luther there will withhold his fist, I'll have a word with you about it. It isn't exactly in my line, I'm aware; for I'm not a divine, but an impudent scapegrace, with a burden of sin that wouldn't lie lightly on the shoulders of a Samson. But I've thought about it I must confess, it being just now a rather common topic in certain quarters. What sort of parson, now, is the man for the times, in your opinion?"

"Why, that's a question that can't be answered in a few sentences. But as this is an age of books and lectures, of mechanics' institutes and reading societies, depend upon it an illiterate man has no chance. Learning is the thing that's wanted. A preacher must be up in grammar, however he may be as to grace. His manners must be perfect, and his matter original. He must have a good style, and, to please some, a little starch. And then—"

"That'll do. You've hit off a pretty unique character. Don't spoil it. Now, what say you, Mr. Sykes?"

"I think earnestness is the thing that's wanted; and I would just say, that if you know anything of Parsons, of York, you've my ideal of a minister. The great fault of our age is, not feeling our creeds. They are pretty correct in a general way, but they are dead things. Men confess them, but are not moved by 'em. A creed should be like an electrical machine. It should give off *shocks*. Mr. Parsons makes you feel your creed. I never hear him when he's in a frenzy, but I feel ever so queer."

.. "Mr. Bower!"

That gentleman had just begun to puff out a long stream of smoke, by way of preparing for his turn. He watched it for a second, after it had got clear of his mouth, as if to ascertain in what direction it was about to steer, and then replied,—

"In my opinion we want men who'll put down all 'new-fangled notions.' I don't know what folks'll get to. They're discovering planets, and finding, they say, all manner of things in rocks, and beginning to tell some sort of tales about the earth having existed thousands of years before it was made. Now I'd have our preachers to put all this down. I think Abel Morgan will yet see the folly of it. I like learning, but not novelty. If I know anything, true scholarship is learning the old, not the new. Dead languages, and so on; not the foolish fancies of living men. I'd have all new planets put down. Those we have are quite enough. And I wouldn't have men digging in the earth—seeking out things that don't belong to us. Let the age of the earth alone. Who's lived so far back as to send word down that it's so old? It's all—"

"Come, Morgan! Are you inclined to give an opinion?"

"The sort of ministers we most want at this day are such as will be friendly with the masses, lecture for them, advocate their just rights, reason with them, answer in a kind way their sceptical objections, and afford proof that they don't seek so much to sectionise society, as to do men good. People don't want cant now. They want sense."

"Well now, look here, gentlemen! What a diversity of opinions? By asking you to express your views, I've shown you, I trust, the impracticability of what our friend Sykes suggested. You are by no means agreed amongst yourselves, as to the sort of parson best adapted to the times. How then is it likely that you'll be able to act in concert! Each of you, like many others, assumes, that the man whom he likes best, with whose modes of thought, expression, ways, he has most sympathy, is the man for the age. Our friend Bray, possessing a smattering of learning, must needs have an educated ministry. More colleges and professors, rounded periods and flashing figures, is his cry. Then you, Mr. Sykes, want earnestness. Fire, and passion, and damnation! Something to keep a fellow alive in the pew! You would have the brimstone bag thrown at him, and a touch of the choke-damp of the pit dashed into his nostrils! That's what you would be at, evidently. Then Bower there would have a class of preachers who'd be sure and put down every new thing. Power-looms to wit, Bower. Who'd be sure and smash those parts of the solar system with which we don't happen to be acquainted, lest by revolving into view they should give rise to the cry of something new. Who'd be sure, in short, and put their foot on truth. An order of men, by-the-by, which the world in past ages has by no means lacked, and hardly lacks at this day. Morgan would have a ministry for the masses. All who don't happen to belong to the swinish multitude he would leave to perish. A just doom, doubtless. He would have the ministry seek on the platform what they're not allowed to command in the pulpit, namely, applause. He would have them lecture on profitless topics, and spend their time in trying to answer vain questions, and all in order to get men to tolerate

"Why, that's a question that can't be answered by sentences. But as this is an age of books, of Luther's doubtless mechanics' institutes and reading societies; a class, illiterate man has no chance. Leave it to the doubt that all wanted. A preacher must be up in the millennium, be as to grace. His manners must be commensurate original. He must have a good deal now on one who little starch. And then—"

"That'll do. You've hit the mark. I don't mean, Don't spoil it. Now, what do you see him in imagination."

"I think earnestness is needed, ignorant, dogmatical, would just say, that if you were amongst curses and flames, you've my ideal of a preacher. Who would blow up not feeling our consciences and bigotry, and bring back the way, but they are in the dark dungeons, if it were not moved by 'em. It is by the common sense of Christendom! It should give us the man for the age! See what crowds he creed. I remember he moves them—(to derisive laughter). O so queer." "A thousand such, say his followers. Don't frown."

"Mr. Sykes, Now, gentlemen, I mean to say that you are all the same. I mean to say, that it would be a most disastrous mistake to mould all our preachers after any one of your model sermons. The fact is, one man suits one class, another meets the tastes and tastes of another class. Mr. Bray says, an educated ministry is the thing that's wanted. Ay, by him and his sort. But is it the thing which those old women want? Those poor, but pious, yet illiterate men want? Those hundreds of children up in yonder gallery? They yawn or doze as he rattles through his classical manuscript, and are surprised when told that he has been preaching unto them Christ, in that unknown tongue! You, Mr. Sykes, say we need the York order of parsons most. They're the thing. Not for all. There is a large class whom that style of pulpit oratory doesn't and never will reach. Cool, thinking, sober-minded men, who want reasons, not rant—fair arguments, not fiery declamation. Who don't desire to have their feelings thrown into a ferment, and who won't thank you to be at any pains to try to do it, by either the oft-repeated tale of the worm whetting 'a keener fang,' or the

flash of the fire that has run so often along the earth, from the garden of Eden to the cross of Calvary, where, luckily for the universe, it was quenched. 'Feeling,' they say, 'was never meant to guide men; that's the work of reason. Hence, talk soberly, sensibly to us. Don't try to frighten us by any cannonade of metaphors and climaxes.' Nor is Morgan's man of the right stamp for every one. I pass by our friend Bower's, for I've a notion that five thousand such men in orders at this day would soon bring upon us the end of the world and the general judgment. Morgan's ministers might do among the masses; but they would just be nothing to others. The higher classes wouldn't be able to endure them. They would be sure to carry with them too strong a flavour of their flocks, to render it possible. And what shall I say of Luther's ideal? Would an army of such brutes be universal favourites? I trow not. They would be very popular, doubtless, with men of perverted taste; with coarse, cruel, impudent dogs, who would always be baiting and biting somebody; whose highest happiness is in seeing one sect probe the weak points and prejudices of another, until, like Bray's breed in such circumstances, they wickedly whisk their tails, let down their ears, and throw up their heels, as if a fire were burning in each pore. But to others they would be hateful. The fact is, gentlemen, each class is adapted to somebody, and if you were to mould after any one model, you would dissatisfy and disappoint nine-tenths of the community. On this, then, I would ground a word of counsel; a sort of farewell address, for I begin to think it is time for us to part. I don't think we shall work well together. If you *will* get a man to teach morals and religion, look out for one who doesn't belong to any of these classes, but who combines something of each, excepting, of course, Bower's. A penetrating, sensible, well-informed fellow, who knows how to enter a poor man's house, as well as sit down at a rich man's table. Who can deliver a learned, logical address, when circumstances call for it, and a simple one, when his audience may seem to require it. Who is in real earnest, but yet not a fanatic; who is honest, candid, straightforward, not one of those dodging rascals, ever cabbaging something to produce an effect, or re-



sorting to some clap-trap trick to get talked about. Avoid such a nuisance by all means. I'll never even come to see you, if you invite such a pest. And just one word more. Why can't you ask that Garside to take such a post? He's some common sense, I'll warrant, albeit he is a friend of Morgan's there. Good-bye, gentlemen; good-bye."

"Not going, Mr. Sparks?" William Sykes exclaimed.

"Yes, I am. I've now given my charge. I shall be able to acquit myself pretty well, shan't I, if I get to the bench of bishops? You and I, Luther, may be under the painful necessity of meeting again."

With these words he left the room. Three of the company agreed that he was an insolent fop.

"Not much of a fop," Mr. Sykes observed, "if by that you mean a simpleton. He's said some sensible things, if we except a few rash expressions, and his hard thrusts at some of our ministers. I'm much obliged for the hint about Garside. He's just the man."

Mr. Sykes would see him, and if possible, prevail upon him to come at once. What did Sparks mean when he spoke of parting, one asked of another.

"To quit the concern, I hope," Luther replied. "If he doesn't, I shall. I'll stand his impertinence no longer."

"It will end in that," Mr. Sykes observed, after a minute's silence. "And if it can be managed, it will be all for the best, perhaps. Those high-family men aren't cut out for business. He's fit only for rank in the army, where most of his connections are. It appears to me that both the brothers missed their way, in throwing in with us. At first I thought well of him. He was kind and humble, comparatively. I suspect his intimate friends are making him believe that trade is a low sort of thing, and that we are mere plebeians. I fear we are mere offal in his nostrils."

"I fear nothing about it," Luther answered. "But I've come to this conclusion, that I'll take no more of his slights."

"Don't speak hastily, my lad. If I know anything of the meaning of words and tones, you are in for a duel. You're sure to be challenged. Just treat it as all such folly ought to

be treated. Don't notice it. Let him brand you coward, if he will. These friends are witnesses that I forbid your heeding all such trumpery."

Mr. Sykes was right. A challenge came the following day, much to Mrs. Lee's horror. It wasn't just the thing, on several accounts. She was grieved that Luther had quarrelled with such a gentleman as Mr. Sparks. For he was, in her opinion, a real gentleman. The only gentleman, in fact, in the firm. True, he swore now and then, and liked his glass, and insulted people, and couldn't endure the working classes, and if he fancied it, would poke his stick through any poor man's window, and then order him to the devil for pay for damages. But it all went to show his thorough breeding, and his notions, and that he'd descended from some noble family. As to the duel, why that wasn't to be thought of. Certainly it was high life, and all that, but it was wrong, and so the thought wasn't to be entertained. The owner of the Farmstead interposed, and saved his nephew from what Sparks and his second would have considered a great disgrace.

Weeks now glided somewhat smoothly on; weeks in which the village went on thriving, and in which the chasm that had yawned between it and the firm began visibly to close up; weeks that witnessed the withdrawal of Mr. Sparks from the company of Sykes and Co., and active preparations for Mr. Garside, the establishment of a large Sunday-school, and the inauguration of a comprehensive method of tuition. In March, Mr. Garside came, and commenced his labours with diligence and vigour. He soon became a general favourite. He preached with power and pathos; prayed with fervour and devotion. His visits were timely and profitable; now to the aged, who for long while had been neglected—and now to the sick, who sighed for counsel and encouragement; now to the poor, whom Mr. Sykes instructed and *enabled* him to relieve—and now to the bereaved, to console whom, God, he felt, had given him a mission. By the assistance of Abel Morgan and the firm, he was soon able to collect and put in circulation a number of valuable books, and to commence evening classes, and thus originate what soon became a mechanics' institute.

In that spring, the improvement of the village was quite obvious. The homes of the workpeople had become cleaner, and they, in their attire, made it evident that their means were increasing. Their manners had perceptibly acquired polish, and their morals tone. Much of that corrupt and corrupting literature, so much deplored by the old schoolmaster, had been supplanted by a higher class of periodicals and books. Political agitation in M—— had greatly declined, whilst as to “arming,” it had ceased to be talked about. The Sabbath too was better observed. The majority of those who had been accustomed to sally from their wretched homes in filth on the day of rest, to herd under walls and hedges, cursing their Creator and denouncing their rulers, now turned into the Sunday-school, or formed part of the public congregation. Drunkenness had become less common, and instances of burglary quite rare. Mr. Bray could pass through M—— without being hooted, and Abel Morgan could speak of the steam-engine without being abused. Mr. Sykes was no longer placed in the same category with Satan; nor Robert Morgan denounced as a coward whom it would be degradation to respect.

The “Problem” was partly solved.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

## VIRTUE REWARDED, AND AVARICE PUNISHED.

IN the afternoon of one of those calm, sunny days, that sometimes patronise the north of England in the month of May, Mr. Sykes stood at the gate of his garden, looking good-humouredly about, as if expecting welcome visitors. He had just bid good bye to Mr. Garside, who had been "dinnering" with him, and reporting his progress in his new sphere of labour. He had stood five minutes, perhaps, when he saw two parasols coming along the road leading from M——. They approached very slowly, but appeared to be very friendly, for they were as near each other as it was possible for them to be.

"Ah," he observed, as if addressing the fine afternoon in a general way, "they're coming, no doubt. And a pleasant walk they'll find it. And right glad I am that they are so favoured, for you may depend upon it they are angels, in a way, that are just permitted to walk the earth for a short time."

After half a minute's silence, he spoke again; and, as if the fine afternoon had mooted some objection to his remark, observed,—

"Well, well, they may be imperfect. . Of course they are. Who isn't, I wish to know? But a pair of sweeter doves never were; nor has there ever appeared, I'll be bound, a couple of human beings by whom the doctrine of the universality of depravity was placed in greater peril."

But the parasols had by this time arrived at the gate; so, turning away from the fine afternoon, or whatever it was that had controverted his former statement, he addressed himself to them.

"Ah, here you come! Shall I relieve you of these incumbances, Hilda, that you may feel this delightful sunshine? How are you, Lucy? Glad to see you. I don't treat the sun as you do, carrying a screen with me, as much as to say, Oh, you may be all very well in your way, but really I'd rather not have anything to do with you! I come out, you see, without hat, and plant myself right before him, which is as much as saying, There now, play away! I can't have too much of your welcome light and heat."

"Why, uncle," Hilda replied, as she closed the garden-gate, "you would soon have us the colour of copper, if you doomed us to go out without these things."

"Out upon you! Am I the colour of copper? And yet I don't use one. Let's have no insinuations to-day. However, we'll let that pass. Now do me the great honour of taking each an arm, and we'll just walk round the garden and smell those wall-flowers."

Gladly they complied; and, as he began to pace the walks, between those youthful friends, and to feel the soft pressure of their arms, and to note their comparatively tiny feet, that seemed hardly to touch the gravel which his own almost crunched, his large heart thumped away with honest pride, and he again compared them in his thoughts to angels.

"And how is your father to-day, Lucy?"

"Thank you, Mr. Sykes, he was as usual when I left. Pretty well; but I can see that father fails."

"And so do I fail, Lucy. And so do all, when they arrive at our time of life. Then man wasteth away, as Mr. Garside reminded us so forcibly on Sunday morning. I begin to feel, my dears, that I'm becoming an old man; and what's more, I'm getting reconciled to it. When that fact first dawned, or rather flashed upon my mind, I felt ever so queer. Getting to be an old man, I thought, and can so well remember being a young man! It appeared to me to be such a little time since I was dreaming the dreams of youth, and never thinking that I should ever be old. I saw aged people; but I suppose I concluded that they had been born so, if I reasoned at all upon the subject; for certainly it didn't occur to me with anything

of distinctness, that young people ever became old. Well, well, I don't wish to make you sad by setting you a seeing yourselves little, wrinkled old women. So turn round, and let's try to find another topic. Isn't this beautiful? I can't tell how it is, but I always find something to interest me in this wide landscape and that blue sky, although I must have looked at them hundreds of times, I suppose, from this very point. Do you hear that, my dears?"

Just then a hoarse, heavy hum passed over them, borne along by the slightest breath of wind. It was brought again by the breeze, accompanied this time by the sound of voices, mingled with the click, click, click of a hundred shuttles.

"Can you tell me what that is? It's the mill. They've the windows open, and the 'hands,' like birds, are moved to sing by the sunshine. I feel glad and thankful every time I hear that music; for to me it is music. Not because I hope to be made rich by it, but because of the good that I hope it will bring to others. It will yield a fortune to our friends if they'll work it; good wages and regular employment to the villagers, if they'll patronise it."

"Not much fear of its being patronised, uncle," Hilda observed.

"Why, not now, perhaps. But there was a time when that appeared very improbable. That humming hive has a sad history. That is to me its only drawback."

"So it has," Hilda replied, and sighed.

Mr. Sykes perceiving that he had made both his young friends sad, by what he condemned as his blundering attempts at moralising, proposed that they should turn in, observing,—

"For certainly you don't seem inclined to talk here."

Hilda and Lucy had been invited to the Farmstead to take tea with Mr. Sykes. They had been asked to meet him alone, and for a special purpose. That purpose was known only to himself. They had cheerfully accepted his invitation; for they had always found it a pleasure, and didn't doubt that it was an honour, to spend an afternoon with him. After an excellent tea, and a somewhat discursive conversation, conducted with consummate skill by the owner of the Farmstead,

that special, but secret purpose, was unfolded. It was done as follows :—

“And this leads me, my young friends, to another subject that I wish to mention. Now, Lucy ! hold up that head and look at me. What do you think those two young—well, we'll not apply opprobrious epithets to them. But what do you suppose they had the impudence to ask me the other day ? Hilda, I wish to see that face, so shake back those dangling ringlets and look this way, out upon the blue sky if you like. If you don't, I shall conclude that you sent them, and then——”

“I, uncle ! I nev——”

“Well, don't mind defending yourself at present. They came to ask me, with all the gravity and assurance in the world, if I'd give my consent for them to—what do you suppose now ? Why, if I'd give my consent for them to marry you. There now, look either at me or the blue sky if you can. Of course I was very serious about it—wouldn't you ?—and asked for their reasons. They had only two to give. One was, that they were sure they couldn't be happy until—I cut them short there, and bade them advance. The other was, that they would be able to throw themselves more thoroughly into business if married ; meaning, it would appear, that you would be sure, by making them miserable at home, to drive them to the mill and the market. ‘Well,’ I again observed, ‘go on.’ But, behold, they'd nothing to go on with. I then said, ‘Have you asked the females if they'll have you ?’ ‘No, not directly,’ they replied. ‘A fine piece of presumption on your part,’ I exclaimed. ‘Get from the Farmstead ! and don't come again until you receive an invitation.’ I couldn't help smiling though, and they saw it ; so that I don't suppose they deemed me very serious. I gave them an invitation yesterday for eight o'clock this evening precisely ; but no hint about company ; so that if you've done as I wished you, they not only don't know where you are, but will be very much surprised to find you here. But don't smile yet ; just wait and learn the extent of my folly. I've something else to say—something to apprise you of which I sought this interview. I'm about this evening to give them full permission to marry,

where and when they may choose. Now, then, you may smile away until I return, for I must leave you for ten minutes;" and he withdrew as he said so.

When Mr. Sykes returned it was with a serious face, for he had something else to say; something which he feared would be very painful to Hilda. He hadn't cared to witness the effect of his former announcement, so had resorted to the expedient of retiring; but the effect of this he was resolved to watch on several accounts.

"Hilda," he commenced, as he sat down in his chair, "I have a few words to add to what I have just said. I address myself to you, because they concern you much more than Lucy. I have resolved, not merely to give the young men my full permission to marry, but also to leave them some substantial token of my esteem. As I observed to Lucy in the garden, in reply to her remark about her father, I am now failing. I may soon be called hence. I shall have property to leave, unless this mill use it up. You are aware, may be, that some time ago I led Luther, and another of my nephews, who shall now be nameless, to look upon themselves as 'The Heirs of the Farmstead.' Sorry, deeply, deeply sorry am I to say, that one of them has rendered himself wholly undeserving of a fraction of my property; wholly undeserving of even my regard or notice."

Hilda here sighed, and Mr. Sykes watched her narrowly as he continued:—

"I have now resolved to supplant him by Robert Morgan and yourself, in case, of course, you marry. You and Luther, I shall henceforth regard as 'The Heirs of the Farmstead.' For Morgan I've the highest respect; and even should he *not* marry you, which is not amongst the most improbable things if you submit to be swayed by your mother, yet, if he continue what he is, I shall in all likelihood adopt him. But anything further, as to the disposal of my property, I intend keeping mainly to myself."

At the termination of this sentence, Hilda's thoughtful gaze was fixed on the reddening sun, hastening to set, whose disc, visible through the branches of one of the garden-trees, appeared



to her fancy torn and jagged. It's not really torn, she said, mentally. It is only in appearance that it mixes with the foliage, and quivers and glistens, like an agitated surface of liquid fire. When it has gained the clear space below that bough, it will shine out again, smooth, round, and beautiful as ever. And my brother may now be suffering in your estimation and in that of others, from this distorting power of imagination, just as it now suffers to the eye from that intervening tree. I pray it may be so, and that he may soon have a clear space in which to vindicate his ways. I know that you haven't so many reasons for disliking him as you may suppose. He's done you *one* good turn.

"Wouldn't you relent, uncle," she observed, after a brief silence, "if brother should turn out a reformed character?"

"I should have no confidence in his reformation, Hilda. I believe him to be incurably bad, and am sorry that you aren't more disposed to give him up. I really—but here come 'The Heirs of the Farmstead.' Now look up, and let us be cheerful."

But it wasn't in the nature of Hilda to be cheerful under such circumstances. She loved her brother. Oh, how pure! how strong! how lasting is a sister's love! How she grieves when her brother doesn't take his place beside other young men of worth! When he doesn't gain as many laurels; rise to as high a position as any of his class! And although she loved Robert Morgan—loved him from her heart's core, and her cousin Luther, she yet felt that night that she could rejoice with greater joy in their fortune and prospects, were Simeon allowed to be a sharer with them.

"The Heirs of the Farmstead" were received by Mr. Sykes with more than his ordinary cordiality. He rallied them on their surprise, and asked them if they were sure they'd been invited for that evening; but took care to press them to feel more at home, and to make it clear that they were more at home, than they had ever before been. Luther, making a feint of thinking a great deal of business, so much that even that accidental meeting didn't render him oblivious of it, spoke, or essayed to speak, of the Mill and the "hands," the market

and money; but was soon interrupted by their entertainer, who informed him that as there was a time to laugh and a time to weep, that so there was a place for business and a place for pleasure; that the counting-house was for the former, and that he wished to see his house made that evening the scene of the latter. He told them how it was, and why it was, that he had invited them to meet his young female friends there. He wished to assure them of his interest in them, and of his willingness for them to marry; and how that he was prepared to assist in providing them with comfortable homes, and in giving them a start in the world. He had admired their mutual affection and constancy; the strength of their attachment, and the sacredness with which they had invested their vows. If he might be allowed to speak of himself, he would tell them that they had in prospect a bliss that had been denied to him. It hadn't been his fortune to marry her on whom his heart in youth fixed. He knew what it was to love, and then to grieve; to look into a face where dwelt every charm that could give interest to the human countenance, and to look upon that face suddenly blanched by death. And he must say that a greater affliction he'd not yet met with, than the being disappointed by death of the heart's first choice. That it might be their lot to be united by the bond of holy wedlock was his prayer; and fervently did he desire that neither the desolating power of death, the dangerous freaks of caprice, nor the injudicious exercise of parental authority, might place in the least jeopardy the answer to such a prayer.

The prayer was answered. In less than six weeks from that evening, that answer was a thing of the past. In less than six weeks, Abel Morgan sat where Lucy had sat on the occasion of that memorable visit.

It was a hot and sunny day, near the close of June. He sat alone, and appeared to be in deep meditation. The table on which he leaned the elbow of the arm that supported his drooping head, was strewn with the fragments of a feast; a feast of wines and fruits and cakes. These, however, he heeded not, but with closed eyes and wrapped sense, lived over again a brief and recent, but momentous period of his life. He saw

his children at home, interested and happy ; interested in, and made happy by, what he knew would leave him lonely and low. He saw Luther often at the school-house, and as often in earnest conference with Robert and Lucy. He saw a wedding-dress and bonnet arrive, that struck him with sadness, as would have done a shroud ; and a morning came, that he had dreaded more than he ever feared the day of his death. He saw his son and daughter, gay and beautiful, light and airy, in a carriage soft with costly cushions, and drawn by prancing horses ; and felt himself driven along in an humbler style, and with less gaudily attired companions. He then saw a group, like unto his fairy children, now tripping lightly up a graveyard, and now arranged before an altar, and heard them speak with trembling voices of love and duty, life and death. Then he saw writing signed, and salutations given, and his daughter, whom he'd nursed, and watched, and reared, borne off in triumph by another, which made him feel like one bereft, like one disowned and left to perish. Then he heard rejoicing in that room, and himself addressed in tender terms by the fairies and the guests. Then he saw the company pass to and fro, some leaving for the village and some returning, and then a sumptuous dinner smoke upon that table, and a merry party gather round, which ate and talked, and joked and laughed, as if it owned no sorrow in its heart, and had no limit to its joy. Then he saw the party rise, and some depart, who shook his hand and called him father, from whose mouth the name had a sound of strangeness, but to whose lips it seemed not unacceptable. And then he saw them followed to the door and handed into carriages, from sight of which he turned away, to heave a sigh and shed a tear, alone.

"Well, they're off, Abel, happy as singing birds," Mr. Sykes observed, as he entered the room, followed by Bower and Bray. "And Mr. Garside is off, and so is my sister, and so are all, excepting ourselves. Come, my friend, fill up your glass. You mustn't let it weigh that heavily upon you."

"I know it's weak, Mr. Sykes, but I can't help it. I feel lonely, sir. Lonely as if I'd lost my all."

"My dear sir," Mr. Sykes replied, feigning great astonish-

ment. "Lost your all! were ever such words heard on such an occasion? So far from having lost, you've gained, like the lucky man in the parable, other two beside them. You've gained another son and another daughter, who, I'll warrant, will love you not less sincerely, although, perhaps, necessarily less intensely, than the others."

"Why, certainly, that is a view that may be taken of it," Abel remarked.

"A view that may be taken of it! Certainly it is. I was just about to congratulate us on our acquisitions. You on obtaining another son and daughter, myself on having obtained another niece and nephew. So let's look up, and not fret. There's our friend Bray here, looking ever so curiously at you. It had never occurred to him, I'll be bound, that a wedding-day, with all its sides, had such a side as this. Had it, Bray?"

"Why, no, in a way not," was Bray's reply.

"I'll pledge my word, now, he's never once dreamt that anybody will be sad when he fetches away Miss —, we'll not mind names, to develop his vast resources. Let us drink success to Bray, friend Bower. Come, fill up, Abel! There! Now I'll tell you something, Bray. A real secret. I overheard these runaways declare to-day, that the first visit they would pay, on returning, would be to Mr. Bray's, where they would make themselves a real good cup of tea, and then rummage up his house. The girls said that they should like it very, very much; that they had often longed to do it, but had been deterred by the look of the thing, but that now they didn't care. Look at that. Abel then can smile, you see, when there's mischief in the wind. Here me, Bray." He lowered his voice, so much so, that Bower had to lean forward to catch the words. "Go direct and declare you'll be married in a week, and astonish them."

"It comes off the day after to-morrow," Mr. Bray replied, blushing much, glancing about with his little eyes as if apprehensive that a hand was being lifted up to knock him down for presuming to speak of anything pertaining to himself.

"Well done! good and faith—just so, Abel. I'll not quote Scripture. Thank you. I confess I'm rather forgetting"

myself to-day. Well done, Mr. Bray, then. Will that do? Shall we go and do likewise, Abel?"

"Hardly at our time of life, Mr. Sykes."

"Then I suppose we must be content to look at, without in any way sharing, the happiness of others!"

"They share happiness in a way, Mr. Sykes, who see it, if they're not envious. I believe we can do that. And I thank God for it; for I do believe that one of the heaviest curses that can fall to the lot of man or woman, is lacking the disposition to 'thoil' another finer things than they themselves possess, or a merrier heart than beats in their own bosom."

"So they do, Abel. So they do. I, for example, am happy to-day, and I suppose it arises mainly from having seen our young friends made so happy. Mainly, mark you. Not solely so. I've another source of pleasure. A source of constant pleasure. Every time I pass through this village, I'm pleased. I've achieved, or rather we've achieved, what my heart had for a long time been fixed upon. We've improved the village."

"Just so, Mr. Sykes. But not every individual. At any rate, not every individual living just upon, and in connection with, the village. There is one person who has in no way improved of late. He has grown worse. He's very unhappy, and your new mill doesn't make him less so, for he hates it with perfect hatred. He curses the very noise of its machinery when it happens to penetrate his ears, and looks every way when out rather than see it, almost coveting blindness for the sake of the blessedness of not being able to look upon it. The sight of its smoke clouding the sky covers his face with frowns; and he has declared, more than once, to his masculine sister, that he'd as soon see ashes fall about him from fired fagots lit to consume his own body, as the bits of soot that sometimes drop from that smoke on to Springhead. He's acted in a very strange manner of late. In a manner so strange, that his sister apprehends he's losing his reason. But she's at your door, Mr. Sykes, and will be able to tell her own tale."

"Please, sir, there's Miss Errton wishes to speak to you."

Our friend Sykes was astonished, and had just got off, "Show her"—the first two words of some direction or other—

to the servant, when she walked into the room bolt upright, and with quite a masculine step and air.

"Excuse me, Mr. Sykes. As I'm not—How do, Mr. Bower?"

Bray she didn't just recognise at once. Abel Morgan she of course wouldn't recognise. She had seen him come too often to Springhead with "pieces," even to "How do" him at all. It was a mortifying thing his being there. What business had he in such society or at such a place? She wasn't going to notice him. It's a somewhat difficult task this noticing, in respectable company, one whom you have seen in a very subordinate position, or known as the follower of some humble occupation! How natural just to throw him a cold nod or two when you don't like exactly to pass him by altogether! Or to "How'd ye do, how'd ye do," him, touching the tips of his fingers with your left hand and passing on, heedless of *his* inquiries after your welfare, as if it was a matter, oh dear! of the smallest moment!

"As I'm not very ceremonious I've walked in. Thank you. You're very kind, but it's hardly worth while my sitting down, as I can't stay more than a very few minutes. I desire that you will walk up with me to Springhead, Mr. Sykes."

"Nothing serious, I hope, Miss Errton?"

"Ah! I suppose you're thinking that I ask such a favour so seldom that something must be the matter. Don't be alarmed, however."

"May I take one of my friends, Miss Errton?"

"Why, if Mr. Bower likes to walk up, well and good."

It was so agreed, and they were soon in the fields, Miss Errton and Mr. Sykes walking and conversing together.

"I desire a little of your advice, Mr. Sykes. You may think it strange, as my brother has been rather shy with you. But remember, *we've* had no quarrel. I can't tell what to do, or how I'm to get on with Hand. He seems incapable of attending to his small business, and yet he won't give it up. He is low and fretful and imagines all sorts of things. One day, he's sure there's a plot amongst the weavers to rob him. He can't see why else they should whisper and nod to one another

in groups, or scan him so curiously as he passes them on his way to his room; and another day, he's sure I mean to poison him that I may get his money. In the morning he's sure that he'll be beggared, unless I can prevail upon the parish to let him have pay; and in the evening, he'll fret and moan, declaring that you will be coming with a force to take him to York, and that they will be sure there to hang him. It occurred to me, that if you would come and speak kindly to him, you might dissipate the last illusion, and give me a word of counsel. I fear his reason is shaken."

It was so. His reason was shaken; seriously shaken. Shaken by avarice. Oh thou foul fiend! Active and powerful for mischief! Not only dost thou grind the face of the poor, and wring from infancy and age the bitter wail of want! Not only dost thou distract in the hovel of the wretched, and turn into the cold streets groups of shivering children, to sleep on stones, and starve on crusts of bread! Not only dost thou reduce, with harsh threats of dismissal, the spare pittance of hard toil, until its earnings dwindle down to a pauper's stipend! Not only dost thou hold thy gold with the clutch of death, refusing to resign the merest fraction, even in aid of providing a bed for the dying outcast, or a covering and protection for the wandering idiot! But sometimes thou dost even turn upon the tyrant possessed and inspired by thee, and, like a powerful, but unscrupulous servant, dost lay him low in the dust, striking the intellect that has pandered to thee as with paralysis, and in the wild riot of thy demon spite and rage, making a wreck of him who has nursed and indulged thee, and compassed sea and land to gratify thy ravenous greediness!

Hand Errton presented a pitiable spectacle to his visitors. With fallen cheek and rolling eye, trembling voice and crouching form, he sat in his small room, tormented by fears and jealousies, suspicions and suspense. He was poorly, he said, and poor, and much to be pitied. He had no friends. Even his sister Jane wished to be rid of him, that she might get his money! But he had no money. He'd been ruined by Sykes's Mill, and if the overseer wouldn't grant him parish pay, he

was sure he should be starved to death. Mr. Sykes perceived at once how the case stood, and observed, as he stood contemplating the once bragging, insolent manufacturer,—

“O Miss Errton, he's demented; that's clear enough.”

“Demented, Mr. Sykes? He somehow seems more lost than when I left him. I guess he's found the bottles, or been drinking. Demented! well, what would you recommend for that? Poulticing and gruel?”

“My dear woman, we don't poultice and give gruel, at this day, in cases of dementation! What I mean, is, that his reason is gone, and, I should fear, will never return.”

“No wonder,” she replied, as she untied her bonnet strings, and watched her brother, who was fumbling a letter in his hands, and muttering with his face turned towards the wall. “No wonder his reason's gone. He's made sorry use of it, God knows. I hope it will take up with some one who'll turn it to better account than it's been turned to here. But what do you advise?”

“I advise that you engage some one to attend upon him for awhile—some quiet, sensible man; and that you deposit money with the overseer, and prevail upon him to come and relieve your brother. It is what's often done in such circumstances. These are grave afflictions, Miss Errton, and what I advise is an humbling stratagem. But it'—

“Oh, I shall care nothing for the stratagem, for every one will know that the relief isn't demanded by necessity.”

“You mean by the necessity of poverty, Miss Errton. But allow me to say that, in my opinion, the necessity which calls for this stratagem is quite as humbling as the poverty that has to lean on the overseer's aid. Such poverty is reckoned humbling, because men are in the habit of looking upon it as a judgment—a judgment following upon the commission of some crime. But what is this less than a judgment following upon the crime of dwelling for a life-time upon money, money, money? The mind has gradually dwindled down to the dimensions of the god it has worshipped! Collapsed, as it were, until that now it is incapable of holding any other idea than its favourite one of money! The man has been trying to



gain the world, and already he has lost in a way his soul. It has gone, and he'll be henceforth a child. Let me exhort you, Miss ——."

"Thank you, Mr. Sykes, I'm much obliged, no doubt. But as I didn't come for you to give me a lecture, you'll do me a kindness to stop—I mean to cease talking in that strain."

"But I'll not cease, Miss Errton, until I've added, that I'm sorry your brother was not led to repentance ere this darkness came upon him. He needed to repent. Grave crimes stain his soul. Whether or not you are aware of it, it is so. He has been no friend of mine, but has done me much injury, and caused me much trouble. But I can, I trust, forgive him. The hand of the Mighty One is upon him, and with him I leave your brother. May he find mercy! Good night."

"Ah, Bower, let us not forget yon sight. Let us take warning, and not seek to gratify our propensities, as the great end of life, lest we, too, be deprived of our reason as an abused trust, and left, mere creatures of blind impulse, to live on in misery and despair, shorn, as was Samson when grinding in the prison-house, of our glory and strength. But I don't suppose he'll live long though!"

He didn't. September witnessed the close of his earthly career. He was interred with show and pomp; but no tears hallowed the vault in which his despised remains found their long home. No one mourned. The children in M——, after his decease, shouted and bounced more merrily in play. Working men declared that they could breathe more freely with such a pest under the sod; and tradesmen were heard to observe, that they had a decided higher respect and reverence for Death, inasmuch as he had shown both judgment and courage, in relieving the market of so great a nuisance, and society of so fierce a brute.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## IN WHICH A PRODIGAL WINDS UP OUR STORY.

IT is the month of October, four weeks after Hand Errton's decease. Of course the newly-married couples have returned to M——, and are beginning to find out, that there is, after all, something rather tame, unromantic, and excessively real, about wedded life. They have been objects of curiosity and interest, and topics of busy gossip; but all that is passing away. They have now ceased to be heroes and heroines. The grand entertainment given to the workpeople in honour of the marriages, when, in a green field, on a sunny day, masters and men met and mingled right heartily, and the young people, in holiday attire, danced to the strains of merry music, and Mr. Sykes asked Abel Morgan if the problem wasn't solved, fully, satisfactorily solved, is being gradually forgotten.

Two houses, rather small of course, have been fitted up for the newly-married pairs. In one of them, William Sykes and Abel Morgan have met; met quite accidentally. It is near five o'clock; clear, cold, and rather windy. Mr. Sykes would like to stay to tea, but he's not been asked. He's sure, however, that he's welcome, so he'll sit on. He *must* be a welcome guest at the board of his niece, however rich the viands. But somehow, she doesn't seem at ease. Yet it can't be owing to his being there. She sews a little, and then rocks herself, like one agitated with unpleasant thoughts. Well, there may be some misunderstanding between her and Robert, which will be put to rights when he returns. So Mr. Sykes resolves to talk and take no more notice of it.

"And I believe I've not spoken to you since until to-day, for you've been away a long time. Yes, he was buried with not a real mourner to follow him."

This has reference to Hand Errton.

"Often the fate of the sordid and selfish," Abel replies, and then leans back in his chair, now glancing at the window, and now at Hilda. *He's* not at his ease, either, Mr. Sykes says, mentally. It occurs to him as strange that his presence should be an intrusion. But it can't be. It is all nothing.

"Ah, Abel, I've thought more of my latter end since his death, than I ever thought before in the time. It some way has stirred up my mind, and I've now begun in real earnest to wean myself from this life. My work is done, and I now wait for my change. Instead of the fathers come up the children! It is consoling to think, Abel, that there are those who'll take our place when we're removed, and more than carry on our work."

He sees a tear trickle down Hilda's cheek. He resolves to change the subject. He won't make her more sad.

"Well, Hilda, I should say that you and yours are about as happy as Adam and Eve before the fall. Do you know, Abel, I spelt out, before any one even hinted at it to me, your son's passion for that little disturber of youthful hearts. I had seen what turned my thought in that direction before the evening that you mentioned to me his sadness. I was then, however, fully confirmed, and resolved, on my way home, to help them all I could. I saw that he had in him the germs of a good husband, and that by a little help he would be sure to make something out in the world. Now, Hilda! aren't you much obliged to me?"

She says, "Yes," and smiles, and begins to bustle about, but doesn't say, Stay tea, uncle. He'll sit tea in, however, and find out what's wrong. But his purpose is frustrated, for he is summoned to the Farmstead.

"There! I'm glad uncle has gone. I feel ashamed of myself for appearing so cold; but I dreaded his remaining the evening."

"Better that he shouldn't, Hilda. I'll explain, when the time to do so comes. He'll see it all and forgive, I hope."

"I know I'm risking the forfeiture of his favour, but my conscience and my heart approve."

"No doubt, Hilda, he'll be offended at first. With all his excellences he has strong prejudices, and hence, when he once gets set against any one, he is set, dead set. This is a common failing amongst good men. They appear to have no faith in reformatations. However a man may vow that he's seen into the error and folly of his ways, they somehow won't believe him. They will suspect him. I'm surprised some of 'em don't denounce Paul's Epistles, on the ground that he was once a Pharisee. But here comes Robert."

The young man glances eagerly round the room as he enters, and says,—

"Alone yet, I see."

He and Hilda and Abel sit down to tea. The fire burns brightly, and yet Hilda remarks that it's rather cold. Robert replies that there is frost in the air. The girl brings in candles, and puts to the shutters. They're not inclined to talk much, nor yet to eat very freely. They note that the wind is rising. It moans mournfully about the house, as if it would tell some tale of woe, and then sighs dolefully in the distance, as if mustering its forces, and preparing to speed away toward the ocean, on some wrecking expedition. The girl reports, as she takes away the tea-things, that it is snowing "very hard," as a little drift on the threshold of the front will convince them, if they will go and look. Abel observes that it is setting in for a stormy night, and that a hard fate is coming upon the weary wagoner and his team toiling on the roads, and the poor sheep that happen to be exposed on they moors. They can't help thinking that they are very comfortable and fortunate, and yet they don't seem happy. The wind moans more mournfully, and the distant sighs roar more dolefully. Robert takes up a book, but can't read; and Hilda produces her work-basket, but doesn't work. Each blast seems to go through her bones, for she shivers and sighs, as they come rushing on and roll away.

"Busy at the mill?" Abel asks, after a short silence.

"Pretty middling, father. But I see we must make up our minds to a race of keen competition. Power-looms are rapidly increasing."

"No doubt of that. I trust, however, that fresh markets will be found, and a good demand kept up."

"And a pretty good demand it must be, to take up all the goods that are now being poured into our markets. Depend upon it, the next news that will greet the nation's ears, will be news of a glut."

"That news won't come yet, if Government will only remove all restrictions from trade."

"I question that, father. It appears to me that if we go on for a few years at our present rate of increasing machinery, we shall soon be able to clothe the world, and have a few suits to spare."

"Not in my time. You've no conception what the world would consume, if once it was got into the way of using our goods."

"It's using pretty liberally, and I've a notion, is fast getting dressed."

"Tut-tu-tut, child! How you talk! Why, it's likely, according to a sum one of my boys once worked, that the world doesn't spend annually, on an average, sixpence a-head on our manufactured goods. We in this nation may be pretty well dressed. We are so. But we are not the world. We may form part of the head and hands of the world. I believe we do; but you don't reckon a man dressed when he's only hat and gloves on, do you? Or a tree feathered with foliage, when only one of its branches is leafed, the rest being naked as an oak at Christmas? Don't apprehend a glut; because if you do, you'll begin to talk of reducing wages, that you may offer your goods at a lower figure, and then grumbling again commences."

"We've been talking about it to-day, father. But we are all determined to hold off as long as possible, the 'Hands' are so agreeable and industrious."

"Thank God that the work-people are so, and that they have to do with those who respect them all the more for it. That is the way for masters to act, if they wish to draw their men to them."

"Oh, I can see that the thing answers admirably. The men are with the masters yonder, without any doubt. The whole

village almost, is on the side of the mill. Have you heard of the affair here last evening?"

"No! what?"

"There was that Chartist lecturer, Bairstow, whom you'll recollect; and as he was to be on the subject of the Corn Laws—against the repeal, of course—I pressed Luther and Mr. Garside to accompany me, and we went. He was quite foul-mouthed, and attacked the mill most mercilessly. Some one happened to hiss, when he called for three groans for the masters and their pious minion. That was understood to refer to Mr. Garside. The meeting actually gave three cheers, which quite knocked the breath out of Bairstow. And then, as if to make matters still worse, some one, seeing Mr. Garside on his feet, demanded for him a hearing. He was most enthusiastically received, and spoke admirably—not exactly in reply to the lecturer, but on the subject of reform generally. He threw back with withering scorn the charge that ministers of the gospel were, as a class, unfavourable to reform and progress. He assured them it was far otherwise. He was for reform, but not for seeking to obtain it by physical force. Of that he disapproved. Let it be done by peaceful agitation, and then it would be worth something. He never—— That's some one at the door, Hilda."

She looks at her candle and listens. She becomes excited, and steps to the room door. After standing there for half a minute, she opens it, and glides into the passage. The father and son hear whispers. Now there is a deep moan, as if some one was hurt. Yet they don't stir.

"He's here," Robert says in a low key, looking thoughtfully at the fire. He continues, "I question the propriety of this, father. I don't suppose Mr. Sykes will ever be brought to notice him. Luther says the same."

The door again opens, and a pale, emaciated figure walks slowly in, Hilda, in deep trouble, leaning on its arm. It holds out a hand to Robert Morgan, who shakes it, and points to the chair from which he has just risen. Hilda sits down at the table, and sobs convulsively. It says, with big tears in its glassy eyes, and the tremor of emotion in its voice,—

"Come, come, Hilda, I'm not worth this. I'm not worth this. I'm not, indeed."

This gentle remonstrance only causes her to sob still more. Her trouble is so great, that Robert, through mere force of sympathy, sheds a tear or two, and deems himself rather weak.

"You've had a stormy evening for your entrance into the old village, Simeon."

"Yes, I have, Abel. I hope you got home all right."

"Yes, thank you, all right; and I'm much obliged to you and your friends for the kindness I received."

"I'm much obliged to you for"—here the emaciated figure has a severe round at coughing, which brings a slight glow into its hollow cheeks, and causes large drops of sweat to appear on its forehead. It pants for a minute and wipes away the sweat, during which the glow disappears with all haste, as if conscious that it has made a great mistake in allowing itself to be strained into so cadaverous a face. Again it essays to speak.

"I'm obliged to you for coming to seek me, and extricating me from my difficulties, and bringing about this meeting. Does uncle know yet?"

"No," Robert replies; "and what's more, we none of us appear to have courage enough to speak to him about it."

The figure is the picture of despair, the sunken cheeks being, if possible, more blanched than ever.

"Well, I shall not be in the way for long. The Lord help me! I'd another slight rupture yesterday morning. I'm fast going."

Hilda again covers her face, and loud sobs betoken that her grief is heavy.

"How is Luther? Does he know?"

"Yes," Robert answers. "He's coming this"—he pauses, and turns his head in the direction of the door, for there are footsteps in the passage. "He's here for anything. Yes."

Luther and Lucy enter. A sweet, handsome, intelligent-looking couple, in Abel Morgan's eyes. Luther advances and speaks kindly to Simeon. He's sorry to see him looking so

poorly; begs him to be seated; observes that he's glad he has been prevailed upon to turn his face homewards; hopes that it will be all for the best; and adds, that he's glad to have the pleasure of meeting him once more. In all this there is such a generous ignoring of past quarrels; such an outflow of brotherly affection; such respect for Simeon's feelings, and nice appreciation of his position, and timely forbearance in regard to his faults and errors; that the prodigal's heart is touched to the core, and his lip set a trembling as if stricken with palsy. Luther asks, how he has come, how long he has been, and what he has had; reminding Hilda, by the last question, that, in the intensity of her sorrow, she has omitted to exercise towards her brother even common hospitality. Luther thinks he should have wine and jellies and broth, and adds that he'll see to-morrow what can be done.

The two young men and Abel try to interest Simeon, and to enable him to sit easily in his new circumstances; whilst Hilda and Lucy prepare him a meal of choice morsels. It is not much that they place before him; but it seems a sumptuous feast to the sickly invalid, as he turns to it with loathing rather than with zest. He imbibes freely of port, however, in obedience to Luther's urgent solicitations; which not merely brings back a deeper-tinged glow into his hollow cheeks, but imparts a temporary buoyancy to his spirits. Hilda thinks him much better than she at first thought him, and so wipes away her tears. As he warms up, he begins to talk very freely. He adverts to changes that have taken place. He's glad his cousin is married to Lucy, and his sister to Robert. She's the best of sisters, and he doesn't doubt that Robert is the best and happiest of husbands. "No doubt of that," some one says. He touches upon the death of Errton, but as that is a topic connected in a way with his reckless career, and as they all desire to keep off that at present, no one takes any notice of his allusion. He insists, however, upon his dealings with Errton being gone into, which leads Luther to observe,—

"Simeon, I'm of opinion that it will do you no good to dwell much at present upon the past. For awhile do your best to forget it."



"I can't forget it. Nor can I do otherwise at present than speak of it. To be plain and come to the point, Luther, I've much to say this evening; much that I must say, or I shall not be able to die in peace. So let me have my way this once."

Well, if he will, of course he may. In the first place, he wishes to have Luther's pardon for everything he's done amiss to him. Luther pooh-poohs, and Abel suggests that he'd best ask his Maker's forgiveness. He's done that, and he hopes he's obtained it.

"Through Christ?" Abel asks.

"Yes, Mr. Morgan, through Jesus Christ."

"That will do, my lad. Glad to hear that! Glad to hear that, Simeon! What a mercy that we can have pardon, free and complete, through Him!"

"But I want Luther's, for I'm truly sorry for what I've done."

It is granted most nobly and generously.

"And now, Simeon, as you *will* be on the past, let me say, that it would be to me a most interesting recital if you would tell us how you were led astray, and what part you really had in certain transactions in which, as you heard from our father Morgan's lips before coming here, you are believed by some to have been implicated. Give the whole truth if you can bear to do so. It will afford you an opportunity to vindicate yourself, which is what you crave, no doubt."

"It is what I crave, Luther, for I do not reckon myself guilty to the extent you and others suppose. I'll tell you how all has happened, if you'll bear with my weakness, and not manifest impatience on account of my tediousness. The way I began going to the Roughts, was as follows:—I had become mixed up with a company of gamblers. And as"—

"Stop, Simeon, if you please," Abel Morgan says. "You must go farther back, or you will leave us in ignorance of the commencement of the mischief. How did you become mixed up with those gamblers? You weren't born so. Let's start there."

"And welcome, Abel. The reason I didn't, I was afraid I might tire you."

"I'm never tired of tracing effects to causes, and I hope my children will never be."

"Well, then, if I'm to begin at the very beginning, I shall have to go back to reading a periodical that came accidentally in my way, which breathed a most anti-Christian spirit, and sneered in almost every number at a religious observance of the Sabbath. It was just something which my evil heart wanted; and every reason it advanced—for it sometimes even reasoned on the subject—why men might and ought to convert Sunday into a day of pleasure, I greedily caught at, and tenaciously held."

"Ah, now you're at the head spring of the mischief," Abel exclaims. "There's where it is! Oh those vile publications! Talk of danger to a country from bands of burglars and marauders! From corrupt courts and governments! From unions and strikes! Why, all that these can do, combined in strongest phalanx, is as nothing compared to the mischief wrought by those hateful periodicals! They are more to be dreaded than plagues or pestilence, famine or fire. Placing before impulsive young men reasons why the Sabbath may be desecrated! And all, as I know is done in such periodicals, with such a flourish of fair play! 'If there are reasons,' they write, 'why may not the most depraved be put in possession of them?' Because they don't know how to estimate, to view, to use them, is my reply. 'Oh, but,' they answer, 'isn't free inquiry the birth-right of all?' Yes, but all aren't qualified to use it. Freedom is the heritage of all, yet you don't let the child sport at the pit's mouth, or carry about razors for play-things. No one has a right to impose fetters on the limbs of his neighbour, yet we manacle our maniacs, and won't let them roam and ravage as may suit their wild fits and humours. And I"—

"Father!" Robert observes, "have you forgotten that Simeon is waiting to go on?"

"I beg Simeon's pardon, my lad."

"As soon as my anti-sabbatarian views were strong enough to support me in the fight with my conscience, I off one Sunday to B—. I fell in with companions, and was right merry."

It wanted about a month to B—— fair, so we agreed to meet there again on the fair Sunday. We did so. I was induced, but not until I'd had a most severe struggle with my conscience, to try my hand at playing cards. I was allowed to win. I tried again and again, with various results. In a few weeks I was fairly linked in. Then I began to lose, and to feel anxious. I was then told, that if Sundays came round too slowly, and I wished to try my hand during the week, I might do so by repairing to Luty's on the Roughs. I went, for I was very anxious to win back what I'd lost. I was so on several accounts. Chiefly on my mother's. She kept an eye on my bank in the balk; found out that I was abstracting money, and scolded me severely for it. I don't suppose that I should then have given myself up so recklessly to the vortex that was beginning to eddy me round, hadn't it been for her. I saw that I must either replace the money or leave home; so I went up it with a sort of wild desperation. Of course the characters frequenting Luty's were just the men for such a game as that. Two in particular, who went by the names of Bland and Blamins, and who soon feigned a decided partiality for me. These men, as I afterwards learned, had no settled abode, but wandered about picking up a subsistence as they could. They were desperate men, prepared for any deed however dark. They soon won from me my money, and I was soon in the greatest distress.

"To my surprise, I one morning, about this time, received a note from Hand Errton, which informed me that he wished to see me, and to say something to me. I went, and was kindly received and hospitably treated. He wished to say that he'd heard I frequented Leechy Luty's; that I played cards; that I was often on the losing side, and in straits for money; and that he should be very glad to lend me a little on a stamped note, if I would get to it my Uncle Sykes's signature, and be sure and pay him a moderate interest. I was surprised, most of all at his supposing it possible for me to obtain uncle's name. I got a note, and oh! God knows, I forged a name! He let me have money, which enabled me to play again. But again I lost, and he advanced me more to my great astonish-

ment. I happened somehow to hint to Bland and Blamins, that I had money in my bank, but that I dursn't abstract it, because that mother kept such a hawk-eye upon it. 'Oh,' they replied, 'we can help you there, Sim. See,' and they offered me, for a mere trifle, a number of notes and sovereigns, not worth their weight in tin. 'Just take these,' they said, 'and place them in that bank, first removing, of course, the good coins it contains; and if your mother is the lady we take her to be, judging from the bairns she's bred' (they winked at each other), 'she'll make her short shanks spin with ecstasy when she sets her eyes on them.' Blamins added to these a chain, and a little more of their waste paper, and said that he should expect for them another introduction to my sister, and a kind word on his behalf. I don't know whether Hilda there remembers sitting up one night, and dozing beside her candle. If she does, she'll no doubt be able to recollect hearing an altercation between mother and myself, the bone of contention being my bank."

Of course Hilda remembers, and is quite flushed by this allusion to a circumstance that had often perplexed her.

"Well, that night I showed mother my worthless possessions, and sorry was I to find that she was well nigh dancing with delight. She would have me try on the chain, and was so pleased with my dashing appearance, that I almost hated her, and could have spit in her face. God forgive me!"

"Amen, amen!" Abel ejaculates.

"It was now next to impossible for me to break away from Bland and Blamins. I was in their power. My neck was in a noose that any hour they could tighten until it strangled me. I owed them money, and had taken their base coin and counterfeit notes. They knew that they had me, and didn't hesitate to let me know it, by taking liberties with me. Driven to desperation, and hoping to gain time and thereby save myself, I promised Blamins to use my influence in order to obtain for him a few interviews with Hilda. But it was my full determination that he should never be allowed to do more than speak to her; for I was prepared, if he should begin to use any of his vile arts of seduction, to strike him to the ground

at once. And now, Hilda, let me have your forgiveness for the wrong I've done you!"

He rises from his chair, and, with tears flowing from his glistening eyes, seizes Hilda's hand, and pathetically craves her pardon. Relieved by the boon, as he calls it, she has granted him, he resumes.

"You will see, Robert Morgan, how it was that I was opposed to you and sister being regularly engaged for awhile. It would have deranged my plans, and precipitated my ruin. In the hope of obtaining her by my assistance, Blamins made to me several concessions, and gave me time to stride clear almost of his net. It wasn't that I didn't think you a match for her, but simply that it didn't suit my convenience. I assure you, that to prevent such a catastrophe as your obtaining a promise of Hilda's hand, I watched you closely. You may not be aware that I saw you pass through M—— that night you left home for Oatlands. I did, though."

Robert looks up, and smiles, and says,—

"Indeed! That's news to me."

"Yes. May be you don't remember a fight between a rat and a weasel in M—— that night? You ought to do, for you leaned over them, and, I believe, touched them with your stick."

Yes, he does distinctly.

"I was then within six yards of you, and not a little puzzled to imagine what in the world you could be about at such an hour. I was sure you saw me, for I peeped over the wall; but I wasn't going to speak to you. I followed you, and watched you into Nelson's wagon, and didn't doubt that you would have company that you wouldn't like, for I'd left Bland and Blamins on the Roughts, not long before, waiting for Nelson. I asked them, the next time we met, how they had got on with you. But they'd seen nothing. I told them that as sure as gun-shot you were in the wagon, and had heard all they'd said. The thought that you'd been within hearing was most mortifying to them, for Bland vowed that Blamins had babbled like a broken-pated parson.

"I gradually came to abhor both my ways and myself, and

to see that I was fast driving to ruin. I suppose I became reckless, or I should not have done what I'm now about to relate."

He tells, amid breathless silence, how that he went to Errton's one evening to pay him interest; how that the manufacturer drank until he was ill; how that during his absence from the room, he, Simeon, stole from his desk the stamped note; how that he stumbled upon a letter which he deemed it desirable to possess; how that he burned the note, but preserved the letter, and hastened to Oatlands from fear of Errton. He next tells them that the letter was in reference to the attack on the Farmstead, and that he gathered from it that Errton was to pay the money offered for the perpetration of the wicked deed.

"I had been apprised of this, and asked to join in it. The end sought in this attack was not plunder, properly speaking, but destruction. Errton offered a hundred pounds through Leechy Luty, to any person, or persons, who would steal from my uncle's desk all papers and paper money, having any connection with the contemplated mill, and burn them on the Roughs in the presence of Luty. It wasn't to be attempted until uncle had been up to London, and drawn money for the purchase of the land, and so on. Errton's motive in this was, to put an end entirely to the company's scheme, and keep the village dependent upon himself. Perhaps Abel Morgan will recollect the evening Leechy Luty spent with him, when he gave the 'Legend of the Bracken Bank,' and be able to see its connection with what I'm now speaking of?"

"Yes, yes," Abel replies; "but he has explained that, and atoned for it too."

"I don't doubt it; and I now wish to explain, and to say that I atoned for *my* crime. I consented to accompany the burglars, but not to do anything. You know who they were with one exception, and how they failed to accomplish their end. I say no more about that, *only that it was due to me that uncle's house wasn't that night the scene of foul murder.* I loitered about M—— and the Roughs for a short time after that, the most miserable of poor mortals, and after many shifts

and expedients, settled down where I have been since, under the disguise of a farm-labourer from Wales. After Luty had broken up his home, he found me out, and came to reside near to me, and we were much together—two great sinners, but sincere penitents. Luty toiled hard at his loom and books, and gave promise of becoming a man of more than average intelligence."

He goes on to state, how that he became attached to Luty, and how that he felt he could never adequately compensate him for his noble protection of Hilda; how that having obtained from old Job information as to the meditated attack upon the power-looms, they had carefully discussed the matter, and that Luty resolved to appear at the scene of action as a runaway slave, and serve the firm in the hour of their need; how that he waited in the greatest suspense for his return, that he might learn all particulars relating to M——, and how that he was plunged into the deepest distress when he received the tidings of his melancholy fate. Leechy had certainly, in his (Simeon's) opinion, done many things that he ought not to have done. But it ought to be borne in mind that he had acted rather as the blind instrument of Errton, than as an agent working out his own will. That tyrant had had him thoroughly in his power; consequently he had been afraid to disobey him.

"On this account he did what he would never otherwise have done to our family. He had no ill feeling towards us. He owed us no grudge. But it appears it was otherwise with Errton. He was bent upon mischief. Consequently he insisted upon Leechy's watching our movements, and reporting as much as he might be able of our family secrets and affairs. To induce him to do this all the more readily and thoroughly, he worked upon his prejudices. He told him that my uncle detested poor men; that he wanted to starve them all to death; and that he would be sure to be the death of all poor men in M——, if allowed to erect his mill. He told me that, as the tool of Errton, he was early on my track; that he had watched me into the house at all hours; that once, when I came inconveniently near him, he assumed the posture of a bear, trying to balance itself on its hind legs; that he had frequented our old,

deserted garret at midnight, that he might listen to the conversation between mother and myself; that it was as the tool of Errton he'd obtained the change from my mother, which had placed her in such jeopardy, and which enabled him to threaten Hilda with her exposure and transportation, if she wouldn't try to seek me up, get from me the stolen letter, restore it intact, and keep its contents a profound secret to all eternity. All this shows Errton to have been a most despicable man. And yet it's not the worst that may be said of him. He once tried to instigate Luty to murder; to the murder of Uncle Sykes. It cannot be considered as less than an endeavour to instigate to murder; for he thrust a five-pound note into his hand, and whispered that he should be glad to hear of the death and funeral of William Sykes of the Farmstead. But Luty, on thinking the thing over, resolved not to soil his hands in that way, and returned the note. He was to have helped in the ruin of Hilda, but, as you well know, became her protector and friend. Oh! no tongue can describe the foul and wicked deeds of that villain! I'd—"

"Nor of your friend Luty, either, Sim," Luther observes. "I'm surprised that you could keep your hands off him, knowing all this. Don't excuse him because he chose to call himself a tool. No man is bound, nor ought any man to be so ruled by another. It will be no justification, depend upon it, at the judgment. In my opinion, if any man should be hung—that is, if it be right to hang at all—it appears to me Luty ought to have swung. What about the company he harboured on the Roughs? If you are not too tired, a word about that if you please. He couldn't say Errton compelled him to give shelter to such worthless fellows as I know resorted thither."

"He'd nothing to do with the company his hut sheltered. They came and went when and how they chose. If he'd objected to their living there, they'd soon have made short work of him. At least he told me so. It was used as a convenience by all sorts of characters. I've seen poachers there, waiting for the mustering of the gang; tramps, resting their weary limbs; fugitives, snatching an hour's repose; burglars, waiting for their hour; rioters and demagogues, for whose apprehension



large rewards were out ; ' Strike-men ' and ' Smashers,' ' Union-men ' and ' Radicals,' and of course, some who gambled, and carried on their persons little banks of forged notes and counterfeit coin. We had once the son of a lord there, who had had to leave his father's house on account of unruly conduct. He carried a black eye that he had received in an encounter with a young baronet, and was the proudest piece of goods that ever found its way to Luty's in my time. But though high and low came there, Leechy never mixed with them. He kept himself mainly to himself. I thank God that I've not been strongly tempted to injure Luty, excepting once. Once, a strong temptation came upon me."

He goes on to speak of it. It was when watching Leechy count some money he'd taken from underneath a flag, and some he carried in a box. He touches on other topics, and talks until he sinks from sheer exhaustion.

What he has said is made the subject of comment of divers kinds. Hilda is of opinion that it is a great pity Luty ever became connected with Errton. Under good influence and training, he might have made a fine character. Luther remarks, that what his cousin has said shows him to have been a great fool, Luty an unprincipled tool, and Errton a deep, scheming, avaricious villain. He wonders God permits such men to live. Robert says that Simeon's narrative uncovers depths of depravity in society, the existence of which he hadn't thought possible. " We don't know what may be going on just over our threshold. Really, truth is stranger than fiction."

After a brief pause in the conversation, Abel speaks.

" It all goes to show, my dear children, how depraved the human heart is ! How potent for mischief is much of our periodical literature ! What evil there is in the paragraph that stifles conscience's voice, or relaxes its hold of the reins of conduct ! It shows, too, that a young man may be impelled in a bad course by home-influences ; that it is a perilous thing to associate with unknown characters, frequent Sunday fairs, and touch the cards or dice ; and that society is yet far, very far indeed, from that fine ideal portrayed in Holy Scripture. Here is a young man all but ruined by his reading, his training,

and his companions! A manufacturer nursing deep hate for one whom he ought to have loved with all his soul and might! And a poor, illiterate, down-trodden outcast, who, in his ignorance, isolation from men, and misconceptions of modern society, dislikes civilisation, made, by threats, and tyranny, and starvation, an instrument of the meanest and most despicable craft! Oh how much remains yet to be done! What call for zeal in the endeavour to work out the regeneration of society! And what need for caution in one's dealings and intercourse with society! For caution, that you may not be led to the reading of the book, to the walking with the companions, to the resorting to the place, to the experimenting with the practices and pursuits, that bite like serpents, and sting like adders! Such things exist! Shun them, my sons and daughters, as ye would pestilence, fire, or flood! Their 'house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.' Good night, Simeon! I sleep at Luther's to-night, and shall therefore be handy for calling in the morning, which I shall be sure to do, if spared and well."

Two days passed, quiet days, during which Simeon is carefully nursed by Hilda, and comforted and counselled by Robert, to whom he communicates additional particulars respecting his painful history. The fourth day comes. He is much worse. Mrs. Lee, who has just returned from a rather long sojourn in Scotland, is with her niece and nephew. He feels himself getting worse, but will talk. He holds Hilda's hand, and observes how different is his lot from hers and Robert's, and Luther's and Lucy's! The way of transgressors he feels to be hard.

"Aunt," he says, a ghastly hue beginning to overspread his countenance, "tell my mother that I forgive her, and that I hoped in death she would forgive me! O God! O God! hear my prayer!"

The hand held by Hilda becomes clammy, and large sweat-drops stud his brow. His breathing, too, is more difficult, and he begins to fix his eyes. They note those symptoms, and whisper the servant to fetch a neighbour. Mr. Garside just then steps in. He sees at a glance what is about to happen,

and offers up a solemn, fervent prayer. The dying man grasps his hands, in token of gratitude. With soft tread Abel Morgan and Mr. Sykes enter. Abel shakes his head at Mrs. Lee, and Mrs. Lee whispers, "It is nearly over." The poor, conscience-troubled sufferer closes his eyes as Mr. Sykes approaches his bed. The latter takes the hand held by Hilda, and presses it: Tears ooze out on to the eye-lashes of the penitent prodigal, and mingle with the cold sweat of death trickling from his perspiring forehead. These evidences of physical and mental agony move the heart of the proprietor of the Farmstead, and he weeps. He speaks to Simeon of Christ and pardon, of faith and heaven.

"Those are the great realities now, my nephew. The things we find to be most needful.

'Commit thou all thy ways,  
And griefs into His hands;  
To His sure truth and tender care,  
Who earth and heaven commands.

'Who points the clouds their course,  
Whom winds and seas obey;  
He shall direct thy wandering feet,  
He shall prepare thy way.

'Through waves and clouds and storms,  
He gently clears thy way;  
Hope thou in Him, thy darkest night  
Shall end in brightest day.'

His breathing is rapidly becoming heavier, and the cold dew of death thicker. A solemn stillness is in the room. All eyes are upon the sufferer, so that a neighbour, if entering noiselessly, is not noticed. There is a rattle, ominous of some rising obstruction to respiration. There are—

"Oh, uncle!"

"Hush, dear!" Mr. Sykes says. This is to Hilda, whose hands he seizes and holds, for they were just now being stretched out to render her brother what he well knew would be no help. With averted face she now moans piteously. The cause is obvious to all.

"There's death there, Abel," Mr. Sykes whispers.

Yes there is, sir. Death in that eye, dimming its light. Death on that brow, printing his dread seal. In that heart, freezing the fountain of life. In that throat, clogging up its passage. In each vein and joint and the very marrow of the bones, purloining energy and strength, and doing that which will shortly render each limb of that wasting frame cold as the clay of its mother earth and rigid as sinews of iron. The blot on the family escutcheon is fast passing away, sir; or at least, it is rapidly being brought into the state in which it will be proper and lawful, expedient and even necessary, to let it down into thick darkness, where dwell damp and destruction, silence and worms, there to await the great resurrection. And now the struggle becomes more severe. The chest rises and falls in quick succession. The muscles of the bared neck swell out and appear like strong cords covered with skin. The eyes begin to protrude and the hands to tighten their grasp.

This, says Abel within himself, is surely the culminating point; the last wrench of death, in this sad process of separating soul from body. Not the last, Abel. There is yet another. The dread monster will find it necessary to put forth yet greater might, and to seem even yet more terrible. O Affection! spare thyself the bitter pain of looking on! Keep thy face averted, for it is here! There is another wrench, and, as if the frail tabernacle was being riven asunder by the violence needed to tear away its occupant, there is a groan, a convulsive start, a gurgle, and a—

"Oh, my lad! oh, my lad!" from Dinah Sykes, who falls prostrate beside the bed. Hilda turns round, and with horror sees her brother in the last agonies of death, blood streaming from his mouth, and her mother in a swoon at her uncle's feet. In violation of her vow, never to darken the doorway of a house kept by Robert Morgan, she had crept stealthily into the bedroom to see her son, of whose near approach to death she had been apprised by a neighbour.

"Ah, that dream!" said Mrs. Lee to Robert Morgan that evening. "It has come to pass. I know that it has hung over Hilda's head like a sword. She may henceforth be a little sadder at times, but after the freshness of this event has passed away, she'll be happier."

It was all.

Sometimes painful events give birth to blisful issues. Not unfrequently heavy blows are transmitted, by a mysterious chemistry, into heavenly blessings. From the *debris* of shivered hopes and frustrated plans, holy thoughts and noble resolutions have been known to rise, and to soar God-ward. The shattering of an idol, the breaking of an illusion, have, ere now, left the soul with a clearer vision and a higher aim. It was so as respects Dinah Sykes. She henceforward treated with respect her son Robert, and with tender affection her daughter Hilda. In Mrs. Lee they found a mother, as did also Lucy Lee. The young men often reverted in thought, to Simeon's unhappy career. It was to them as the foam of the breakers—as lights on the cliff indicating the place of danger, and the need for caution. It wasn't forgotten, either, by Abel Morgan or William Sykes. After they had become feeble men, and fond of sitting for long hours on each other's hearth, talking now of the growing families of the "young people," and now of the history and position of the village, they would touch with tender words the chequered course and painful end of one who had once been an "Heir of the Farmstead."

"Such," Abel would say, "are the ways of them that forget God and truth, rectitude and temperance. They fall into evil and a snare, and are cut off, full of bitter regrets and stinging remorse."

THE END.





